

NEVER Fire First



by

JAMES
FRENCH
DORRANCE

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NEVER FIRE FIRST



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Constable La Marr wondered if the slogan of the Mounted applied in case one had to deal with an insane native.

NEVER FIRE FIRST

A Canadian Northwest Mounted Story

BY

JAMES FRENCH DORRANCE

CO-AUTHOR OF "GET YOUR MAN,"
"GLORY RIDES THE RANGE"

Frontispiece by

CHARLES DURANT

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To
JOHN WOODS DORRANCE
FATHER AND FRIEND



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I CHANCE OF MORPHEUS	11
II THE ESKIMO WAY	19
III COMPLICATION ASTOUNDING	27
IV BEST OF BAD BUSINESS	36
V SILVER AND BLACK	52
VI REGARD FOR THE LAW	60
VII WANTED—AN ESKIMO FOX	67
VIII THE HERO FUGITIVE	78
IX THE SKEIN TANGLES	86
X HARD KNUCKLES	96
XI THE SCARLET SPECIAL	107
XII LIVING TARGETS	115
XIII HIS MONTREAL PROMISE	134
XIV A DOUBLE-BARRELED CASE	142
XV UNDER SUSPICION	159
XVI THE "WIDDY" IN GRAY	170
XVII RICHER THAN GOLD	183
XVIII A CRYPTIC MESSENGER	195
XIX INTO THE NIGHT	214
XX MORNING'S MAZE	225

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXI	THE CLOSED CREEK	236
XXII	FIGURE OF SPEECH	244
XXIII	WHEN MORNING CAME	259
XXIV	TENT-TOLD TALES	270
XXV	CLUTCH OF THE BREED	279
XXVI	BOOT AND BOOTY	291
XXVII	BRIGHT WITH PROMISE	301

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CHAPTER I

CHANCE OF MORPHEUS

FROM the "dig-in" of the snow-bank where he had spent the blizzard night in comparative comfort, Constable La Marr of the Royal Mounted looked out upon a full-grown day. The storm that had driven him to shelter had passed, or at least was taking a rest. For once he had overslept and where days, even in winter's youth, are but seven hours long, the fault caused him chagrin.

That a "Mountie" in close pursuit of a murder suspect should have made such a slip was disconcerting even to one so young as La Marr. He found little consolation in the fact that when he had enlisted in the Force he had not dreamed of an Arctic assignment, but had expected one of those gayly uniformed details in Montreal or Quebec.

His concern, if the news ever leaked out, was of the reaction upon his immediate superior, Staff-Sergeant Russell Seymour. But small chance of that leakage unless he himself weakened—or strengthened—and tested the adage that confession is good for the soul. Seymour, a grimly handsome wolf of the North in command of the detachment post at Armistice, was now two months absent on an irksome detail of snow patrol, one that should have fallen to the rookie constable, except for his inexperience.

La Marr stamped out of the snow-hole that had sheltered him and restored circulation by vigorous gymnastics. Light as was his trail equipment, being without sled or dogs, he had not suffered, having learned rapidly the first protective measures of the Arctic “cop.”

He was about to make a belated breakfast from his emergency pack when his glance chanced toward the north and focused upon a furred figure headed down the snow ruff on a course that would bring him within easy reach.

“Aye, not so bad!” he congratulated audibly. “I get me man by sleeping on his trail!”

He chuckled as he watched the snow-shoed Eskimo stumble directly toward the trap that was set for him by chance of Morpheus.

Yet the young constable took no chances.

A murder had been committed two days before at Armistice, almost within the shadow of the police post. The crime seemed a particularly atrocious one to him from the fact that a white man, a trader's clerk, had been the victim. Any Eskimo who would go to such lengths was either desperate or insane. La Marr felt called upon to be very much on guard as he waited within the shelter of the snow-trap.

He had not a doubt that the native approaching was his quarry, any more than he had of that quarry's guilt. He wondered if the slogan of the Mounted applied in case one had to deal with an insane native. It would be easy—and providentially safe—to wing the oncomer, undoubtedly unaware of the nearness of a Nemesis.

But the training at the Regina school of police that a "Mountie" never fires first is strict and impressive. Constable La Marr could not take a pot

shot even with the intent only to wound the flounderer.

Next moment surprise caught him—surprise that Avic, the red-handed culprit, was fighting his way back to camp. But wait, he'd have to revise that thought for this particular murder had been done in a peculiar native fashion that shed no blood. Anyhow, why should one so obviously guilty of killing a white man in a bronze man's country be headed toward the police post from which he had made a clean get-away?

No answer came to La Marr. He merely waited.

The Eskimo floundered on.

The constable's concealment was neat enough in a country where all is white. It was better even than bush or shrub, for they were so rare as to be open to suspicion. At just the right second he lunged forward and took the native entirely by surprise. The two went over in a flurry of snow.

For a moment the Eskimo struggled fiercely, possibly thinking that his fur-clad assailant was an Arctic wolf. But his resistance ceased on recognizing he was in human grip.

La Marr yanked his captive to his feet and

searched for weapons, finding none. Then he remembered the rules of the Ottawa "red book" and pronounced the statutory warning.

"Arrest you, Avic, in the name of the king; warn you that anything you say may be used against you. D'ye understand?"

As he asked this last, which is not a part of the official warning, he realized that Avic did not.

"Barking sun-dogs, why didn't the good Lord provide one language for everybody?" he complained. "Anyway, there ain't much chance of my understanding anything you may say against yourself. I'll tell it all over to you when I get you to the post. Now we'll mush!"

"Ugh—yes," grunted the Eskimo, seemingly undisturbed.

The young constable was puzzled by the prisoner's demeanor. He stared at the man, whose stolid expression was heightened by thick lips and high cheek-bones. Perhaps the native did not know he was in the hands of the police and on his way to pay for the dreadful crime.

Raising his *parkee*, La Marr disclosed the scarlet tunic which he wore underneath. It was the

color of authority in the far North; no Eskimo who ever had seen it before could doubt it.

There was no gleam of intelligence in the dark eyes that stared from behind narrow, reddened lids. There dawned upon the constable a possibility. The Eskimo was snow blind under the curse of the Northland winter which falls alike to native and outlander, at times. That would explain his back-tracking. Rather than wander in circles over the white blanketed tundra until a miserable death came to his rescue, he was hurrying back, while a glimmer of sight yet remained, to take his chances with the mystery called "Law."

"Not a bad choice," thought La Marr as he stepped out ahead to break the trail that the night's blizzard had covered.

After locking his prisoner in the tiny guard room, a part of the one-story frame structure that sheltered the small detachment, the constable started for the post of the Arctic Trading Company a few hundred yards away. He was young, La Marr, and pleased with himself over his first capture of importance. He anticipated satisfaction in discussing the arrest with Harry Karmack, the only

other white man at Armistice now that Oliver O'Malley had passed out.

But he did not get across the yard.

The report of a rifle from down the frozen river, which flowed north, halted him. He saw a dog team limping in over the crust, unmistakably the detachment's own bunch of malamutes. The man at the gee-pole could be none other than Sergeant Seymour, returned at last from the long Arctic patrol.

Here was a vastly more important auditor for his triumph. He sprang forward to offer salute and greetings and to help with the malamutes, for an Eskimo dog team always arrives with a flourish that is exciting and troublesome.

Once the animals were off to their kennels and before Seymour fairly had caught his breath from the last spurt into camp, the young constable was blurting out the details of Oliver O'Malley's untimely end.

"But I've captured the murderer!" La Marr exclaimed in triumph. "I've got Avic, the Eskimo, hard and fast in the guard room. Come and see."

With interest the sergeant followed the lead of the one and only man in his command.

The native had been squatted on the floor with his back against the wall near a stove, the sides of which glowed like a red apple. On their entry, he rose muttering in gutturals that meant nothing to the constable. Seymour gave one glance of recognition, then turned.

"You've got a murderer, sure enough, La Marr," he said with that slowness of speech so seldom accelerated as to be an outstanding characteristic. "But his name's not Avic and by no possibility could he have had anything to do with the killing of O'Malley."

"Then who the hell——," the constable began.

"This is Olespe of the Lady Franklin band. For three weeks he's been my prisoner. On the sled out there are the remains of the wife he killed in an attack of seal-fed jealousy."

The chagrin of Constable La Marr was written in gloom across a face so lately aglow.

CHAPTER II

THE ESKIMO WAY

GRIM, indeed, had been Sergeant Seymour's sledded return to his detachment. For more than two hundred miles across the frozen tundra he had driven his ghastly load—the murdered woman wrapped in deer skins after the native custom, sewed up in a tarp and lashed to a *komatik*, the Labrador sled that gives such excellent service on cross-country runs. All this, that the inquest which the Dominion requires, regardless of isolation, might be held in form and the case against the uxoricide assured.

And out ahead, unarmed, and under "open" arrest, had mushed the murderer himself, breaking trail toward his own doom. Often in the whirling snow, Olespe had been beyond his captor's sight. But never had he wavered from the most feasible course to Armistice; always had he been busily making camp when the dogs and their official driver caught up at the appointed night-stop.

No white man could have been entrusted with such "fatigue duty" under like circumstances. Three weeks of such opportunity for remorse must have been too much.

But Seymour was not thinking now of this recent ordeal.

The case of Olespe, except for the formalities of coroner's inquest, commitment and trial was settled. The plight of his unhappy constable held the pity of the sergeant, always considerate.

"I'm not blaming you, Charley," he assured. "Until you've been up here a few years, all Eskimos look right much alike."

"Can't I start after the real Avic at once," pleaded the constable. "I'll make no second mistake."

La Marr was as eager as a hound held in leash after its nose has rubbed the scent. But he could not, just then, bring himself to confess his oversleeping.

Seymour did not answer at once, but set about taking off his heavy trail clothes and getting into the uniform of command. He was a large built

man, but lean of the last ounce of superfluous flesh owing to the long patrols that he never shirked.

The scarlet tunic became him. Across the breast of it showed lines of vari-colored ribbons, for his service in France had been as valorous as vigorous. He had gone into the war from his Yukon post and, almost directly after the armistice, back into the Northwest Territories to establish one of the new stations of the Mounted in the Eskimo country.

The green constable chafed under the silence, but he did not make the mistake of thinking it due to slow thinking. With Seymour many had erred in that direction to their sorrow. The sergeant certainly was slow in speech, but when he spoke he said something. He might seem tardy in action, but once started he was as active as a polar bear after a seal.

"No hurry about taking after this Avic," he said at last. "Likely he'll not travel far this double-thermometer weather." The reference was to a jocular fable of the region that to get the temperature one had to hitch two thermometers together. "At worst he can't get clear away—no one ever

does, except when old man Death catches him first. We'll hold our inquest, then I'll issue a warrant."

"And detail me to serve it?" La Marr's question had that breathless interrogation point of secret self-accusation.

To Seymour's thin lips came that whimsical smile which transformed his whole expression, despite its blanket of beard. To a student of expression, this would have shown the tenderness of a woman to be concealed beneath the life-hardened mask. His grimness melted like snow beneath the caress of a Chinook wind; yet warning remained that this gentleness was not open to imposition.

"Right-o, Charlie," he promised. "I've made mistakes in my day and been thankful for the chance to rectify them. You're nominated to bring in whoever is named in the warrant after the inquest. Let's go."

He put on a pea-jacket, on the sleeves of which the stripes of his rank stood out in deep yellow. On a thatch of towsled, brownish hair he settled the fur cap proscribed in the regulations for winter wear.

Outside they first attended the disposal of the sled. Without telling the post's native hostler the grim nature of their load, they saw it placed in a shed which had the temperature of a morgue.

Adjoining the police buildings on the south was the establishment of the Arctic Trading Company, Ltd. This was a low but substantially built structure of timber and stone, also facing the frozen river. The "Mounties" entered the storm door which gave upon the factor's quarters, with the intention of divorcing Harry Karmack from his book and pipe long enough to accompany them to the scene of the local crime.

"Dear eyes, but it's glad to see you home again, Serg.," was the trader's greeting, as he arose from his chair beside an "airtight burner" and extended his hand for a hearty grip. "Things have come to a pretty pass in the territories when the 'Skims get to biting the hands that are feeding them."

Seymour met this comment with a grave nod. Like others of the Force on Arctic detail, he was surprised at what approached an epidemic of murderous violence among their Eskimo charges, in general a kindly and docile people.

A prepossessing individual was Harry Karmack, not at all the typical trader. He was dark, from a strain of French blood in his Canadian make-up, with laughing eyes and a handsome mouth. As he seldom took the winter trail, he shaved daily "so as not to let the howling North get the better of me," as he liked to put it. His smooth cheeks contrasted sharply with the bearded ones of the officers, their growth cultivated for protection on the snow patrols. Generally Karmack wore tweeds over his powerful frame and a bright tie beneath the collar of his flannel shirt. At that, he was a seasoned sour-dough and a sharp trader, respected and feared by the natives.

"What do you think's got into the blood of the breed all of a sudden?" he asked.

"We've handed them too many rifles, for one thing," offered Seymour slowly. "But don't you worry, the Mounted will get the deluded creatures in hand. Will you come with us for a look at the O'Malley scene?"

Karmack reached for his furs.

"If you don't," he remarked, a severe note in his voice, "you scarlet soldiers won't be any safer

than us traders. When I think of young O'Malley, one of the finest chaps I ever knew, struck down here at a police post——"

A catch in his voice stopped him. Taking a battery lantern from a cupboard beside the doorway, he signified he was ready for the said inspection.

La Marr led the way to the scene of the crime—a stone hut half buried in the snow. At the door he broke the R. C. M. P. seal which he placed there before setting out on his futile pursuit of the suspect.

"Nothing was disturbed, sir," said the constable in a hushed voice. "Everything is as Karmack and I found it when we came to investigate why O'Malley did not return to the store."

They stepped out of the gathering dusk into a windowless room. The roof was so low as to cause the shortest of them to stoop. The trader pushed the button on his lantern and raised it.

Across the cave-like room, which was bare of furniture after the Eskimo fashion, Seymour stared. There, in a sitting posture on a sleeping bench, was all that was mortal of the assistant factor.

In life, O'Malley had been a handsome youth of pronounced Irish type. Sudden death had wrought so few changes that the sergeant had difficulty in believing that he looked on other than a sleeping fellow human. A dankness, as of a tomb, served to convince him.

The victim's head rested against the back wall of the hut; his crossed feet upon a deerskin floor covering. Clutched in one hand was a black fox pelt. Upon the sleeping bench beside him lay one of silver. Both looked to be unusually fine skins. Presumably, some dispute over the price of the prizes was the motive of the crime.

Karmack stepped closer with the light; indicated by gesture a knotted line of seal skin around the victim's throat, the end dangling down over his *parkee*.

"The Eskimo way!" muttered the trader brokenly.

The shudder that passed through Seymour's wiry frame was not observed by the companions of the inspection. No more was it caused by the untimely fate of Oliver O'Malley.

CHAPTER III

COMPLICATION ASTOUNDING

As is the silken kerchief to the Latin garroter, so is the Ugiuk-line to the Eskimo bent upon strangulation. Strong reason had Sergeant Seymour of the Mounted to realize the possibilities in the clutch of the stout cord made from the skin of a bearded seal.

Although he had made no mention of the fact in Karmack's quarters, when the trader pronounced warning that the out-of-hand Eskimos soon would be clutching for the throats of the wearers of the scarlet, already had they clutched at his. The vivid memory of his narrow escape had brought his involuntary shudder at sight of the sinister drape about O'Malley's throat.

On the farthest-North night of his last patrol, he had elected to sleep in a deserted igloo on the skirts of a village rather than suffer the stifle of an occupied one. After midnight he had awakened from a strangling sensation to find himself in the

hands of two stalwart assailants. The knot of a similar seal-hide line was gripping his throat. He had thrown off the pair only by an effort so supreme as to leave him too weak to follow them through the snow tunnel into the storm. Probably he never would know their identity or be able more than to guess at their motive as one of fancied revenge.

Seymour did not speak of this now as they stood in the hut of tragedy. No more did he mention the news that slowly was filtering through the North that Corporal Doak, Three River detachment of the Royal Mounted, and Factor Bender of the Hudson's Bay company post had been slain in a brutal and treacherous manner. To spread alarm was no part of his policy. But over at the post was the Ugiuk-line that had been used on him and in his mind was a vivid idea of its practice in Eskimo hands.

From these—the fearsome souvenir and the shuddering memory—he suspected that the O'Malley case was not as open-and-shut as it seemed. For him, mystery stalked the crime, one that would

not be solved by the apprehension of Avic, the Eskimo.

Silently, he completed his immediate investigation of the crime. Two points stood out to confirm the suspicion born of his intimate knowledge of the Eskimo garroting methods. Upon the *corpus delicti* there was absolutely no mark except the sinister purple rim about the throat and a blood spot beneath the skin where the knot in the seal line had taken strangle hold. In the hut there was no sign of a struggle such as he had put forth to save himself in the igloo, not a dent in the earthen floor or a skin rug out of place. Yet, as he well knew, O'Malley was a powerful youth and of fighting stock!

"Let's have the facts—such as you know." The sergeant turned suddenly to Karmack.

"Dear eyes, I should say you shall have them—every one," returned the trader eagerly.

Despite certain mannerisms and his unusual—for the outlands—fastidiousness of dress, Karmack was straightforward and exceedingly matter of fact.

Word from native sources, it seemed, had

reached the trading company's store several days before that Avic was in from his trap line with fox pelts "worth a fortune," according to Eskimo standards. He had borrowed this hut in which they now stood in the outskirts of the town from a relative and had sent the native for the makings of a "party," or *potlatch*. The hunter himself had not appeared in camp or sent any direct word to Karmack that he had fox skins for sale. He had no debit on the books of the Arctic company, so the reasonable supposition of his aloofness was that he meant to drive a hard bargain.

Skilled in barter with the natives, Karmack said he had countered by betraying no interest in the arrival of the aloof hunter. He had felt confident that, given time, Avic would run short of funds for entertaining and market his catch at a reasonable figure. But, at length, had come disturbing rumors over his native "grape-vine." Avic had heard, the rumor went, that the Moravian Mission has established a new trade store at Wolf Lake, near the big river—the mighty Mackenzie. He was excited by tales of high prices paid there and was planning to migrate to that market with his prizes.

"It was then," continued Karmack, "that I told O'Malley to mush over to see this bird and talk him into a good humor. The young chap had developed a knack at sign-language barter, although he knew little Eskimo; I was busy on a bale of furs at the store. He was just to persuade Avic to come into the post where we'd come to some satisfactory agreement as to price for whatever the 'Skim's traps had yielded.

"By gar, sir, two hours passed and Oliver did not come back, nor was there any sign of the hunter. The mission shouldn't have taken him half an hour, for all in the name of reason that the native could have wanted was for us to come to him with an invitation. I began to get anxious and started out to see what was what. Meeting La Marr out front, I asked him to come along with me, still with no apprehension. We found what you yourself have seen—exactly that and nothing more."

He paused for a moment with his emotion, then: "Holy smoke, man, if I had known what would eventuate, I'd never have sent him but gone myself. They're afraid of me, these confounded huskies,

and I'd grown to love that boy as a brother!"

"What do you know about O'Malley, Karmack—how he came into the territories—what he'd done in the provinces—all that sort of thing?" Seymour asked the disjointed question seemingly satisfied with the other's preliminary statement.

The trader was silent a moment, thinking.

"Not a great deal, come to think of it," he said, before his hesitation had become pronounced. "A tight-mouthed lad, Oliver, when it came to his own affairs. He hails from Ottawa and was sent out by the president of the Arctic Trading Company. Brought a letter from the big chief telling me to make a trader out of him, if possible. Evidently his people have money or influence. Perhaps there's some politics in it. I don't really know, old bean."

"Hadn't been in any jam down below, had he?"

"Oh, rather not—not that sort at all. May have seen a bit of Montreal or Quebec and perhaps had crossed the home bridge to Hull, where it's a trifle damp, you know, but nothing serious, I'm certain. The big chief never would have sent me a blighter."

The sergeant asked for the victim's next of kin and who should be notified.

"Oliver never spoke of his family," answered the factor. "Had a picture or two on the packing box he used for a bureau, but we never discussed them. Said to notify the head office if anything went wrong with him. Dear eyes, the lad was peculiar in some ways. You'd think——"

The sergeant's interest seemed not to lie in the trader's thoughts. He had two inquests on his hands, to say nothing of the capture of Avie of the foxes. For the moment forgotten was the fact that he had promised Constable La Marr this detail. Moreover, there remained that suspicion, born from his own narrow escape from the Ugiuk-line, that there was more behind the murder than appeared on the surface. He led the way from the hut; waited until La Marr had affixed another police seal on the door, then moved ahead into the main trail, a sled-wide path which camp traffic kept beaten down between the banks of snow.

A shout from down-trail startled them. From out of the increasing dusk, bells jangling, bushed tails waving like banners, dashed a dog team

dragging a light sled. Wondering, they flattened against the snow to give gangway. The arrival of a strange team at that time of year was an event.

The sled was braked to a halt a few yards down the trail. A tall driver, slim despite an envelopment of furs, sprang from the basket and waited for them to come up.

"I thought I recognized a uniform in passing—and I need direction."

The voice sounded clear as a bell on the evening frost and unmistakably feminine. Moreover, it carried none of the accent peculiar to the half-breed mission-trained women who spoke English. They looked closer into a face of pure white and eyes that might have been brushed into the pallor with a sooty finger.

A white woman in Armistice—a young and comely girl of their own race! Think how incredible it must seem to three who had settled down to an October-April winter of isolation.

"I'm Sergeant Seymour, of the Mounted, in charge of this detachment," offered the policeman, for once speeding his speech. "Who're you looking for, ma'am?"

"I must find Oliver O'Malley's fur trading store."

"And who might be seeking our young trader?"
The sergeant kept from his voice any hint of the dread that had clutched him.

"I'm Moira O'Malley of British Columbia—his sister."

This astounding complication left the three men speechless, glad for the dusk that helped mask the consternation that must be written on their faces.

CHAPTER IV

BEST OF BAD BUSINESS

IN his grown-up life, Sergeant Seymour had met a procession of emergencies. Seldom had he failed to do the right and proper thing—the best for all concerned. But never had he faced a more difficult proposition than that presented by the young woman who now faced him on the trail, awaiting news of the brother she had journeyed so far to join.

When he thought of what lay in the hut they had just replaced under Mounted Police seal, he was distressed to the quick. When he pondered the distress and disappointment that must be hers when she learned the truth, that hidden strain of kindness within him promptly interposed barrier against his blurting out the facts, police fashion. He felt that he must temporize.

“You’ve come to the right camp, Miss O’Malley, but your brother won’t be in to-night. In the morn-

ing——. But surely you did not mush from the Mackenzie alone?"

A small sigh, doubtless of disappointment at the further delay, passed her lips; but no exclamation came. Evidently she was a self-contained young person.

No, she explained readily, she had not come alone. The Rev. Luke Morrow and his wife were behind with another sled and they had traveled only from Wolf Lake. The Rev. Morrow, it seemed, was a friend and fellow churchman of her father, then stationed at Gold, British Columbia.

"*Only* mushed from Wolf Lake!" exclaimed Constable La Marr, stressing the only, although after one glance into her wonder face he was hating himself the more for having let the fox hunter get away from him.

The missionaries were having trail trouble, she continued. Being so near journey's end, she had dashed on with her lighter load, hoping to send her brother to help them into camp, as well as being the earlier to the reunion.

"Constable La Marr will go out at once," declared the sergeant. "How far are they?"

"Searcely a mile. We were in sight of your flag when they spilled."

La Marr at once took the baek trail, not waiting to go to the post for the worn police team nor, considering the distance, wishing to experiment with the girl's strange huskies.

At the moment Moira turned to quell an incipient dog fight; the sergeant turned quickly to Karmaek.

"Not a word to her until after the inquest—until we've a chance to break it to her gently."

The trader nodded agreement and was introduced when she had straightened out her team.

"Mr. Karmack was—is your brother's chief here at lonely young Armistice?"

For a moment he held his breath for fear the verb slip would be noticed and the question of tense raised. The girl, however, was too much interested in her surroundings to heed. The trader helped by bowing in his best manner and seizing one of her mittened hands in both his own for a warm greeting.

"A fine lad, Oliver. Dear eyes, what a fine chap!"

His startling exclamative caused her own eyes to open, but Karmack merely grinned in amiable fashion.

"I hope you and your friends will accept the poor hospitality of the trading post, at least for this night," he concluded heartily. "We'll have plenty of room."

"But isn't there a mission house," began the girl. "I thought the Morrows——"

Seymour interrupted.

"Nothing doing, Karmack, with your commercialized hospitality. They're the first visitors of the winter; I claim them in the name of the king." He turned to the girl. "The mission house hasn't been opened for months. We'll make you comfortable at the detachment barrack—won't have to use the guard room, either. If you'll draw rein at the flag pole——"

Her "mush—mush on!" to the dogs rang clear and gave the policeman further speech with the factor.

"You couldn't have her there to-night, Karmack, in view of what I have to tell her to-morrow. Her brother's things scattered all about——she'd ask

too many questions. Have you tangled in no time."

Again Karmack nodded agreement. He hadn't thought of that, but only of being hospitable. It would have been a treat, though, to entertain such a charmer under the chaperonage of the missionary couple. He would send up some butter for their supper. That of the police stores smelled to the heavens.

"That's fine; if ours came from cows, they were athletes," Seymour replied with a grimace. "Come up with yourself for coffee. And I wish you'd send your man for their dogs and kennel them for the night. My malamutes raise Billy-blue when there's any new caninc clan in sniffing distance."

The isolation of Armistice, with its difficulties of transportation, combined with its newness as a police post caused even the living room of the detachment to take on a barracks-like austerity.

The scant furniture had been made on the spot and was all too rustic. There were bunks along three walls and a scattering of skins upon the rough boards of the floor. A lithograph of King George,

draped with the colors, occupied a position of honor, the only other decoration being a print of the widely popular "Eddie," Prince of Wales. But logs blazed cheerfully in the stone fireplace and Moira O'Malley, divested of her outer trail clothes, looked very much at home as she stood to its warmth.

Not until he returned from the kitchen and the starting of a "company" supper did Russell Seymour realize in full the startling beauty of the Irish girl who had come to them at such an unfortunate moment. She was within an inch of being as tall as himself as she stood there on the hearth. Her lampblack hair, coiled low on her lovely neck, actually was dressed to show her small ears—and almost had he forgotten that white women had pairs of such.

A generous mouth, full and red of lips, sent his eyes hastening on their fleeting inspection when she became aware of his presence in the kitchen doorway. If the even rows of pearls behind those lips had flashed him a smile then, the temptation must have been too great. Her slender figure merely hinted at rounding out in its mould of black blan-

ket-cloth. He glanced shyly at her ankles—always the cover-point in his estimate of feminine pulchritude. She still wore her trail *muckluks* of fur, clumsy looking as a squaw's sacking, but he knew beyond doubt how silk stockings and pumps would become her.

In the eyes he had remarked on the trail, however, Moira's beauty reached its highest peak, he decided. They were as blue as the heart of an Ungova iceberg and as warm as the fire which glowed behind her. They looked out at him in a friendly, inquiring way from behind lashes as dark as an Arctic winter night.

And on the morrow those lashes would be wet with tears of grief. At the moment he'd gladly have given his hope of heaven to have ushered a laughing young Oliver O'Malley into the room.

"Decorative, to say the least," she remarked, at last flashing him the threatened smile.

"Yes, ma'am—what ma'am?" he stammered.

"The uniform of the Mounted as you wear it in that door frame," she teased him. "At that, I'd rather see it—you on a horse."

He fell back on the only defense he knew—a

pretense at seriousness. "Up here we're the Royal Canadian *Dis-Mounted* Police, Miss O'Malley. We know only two seasons—dog and canoe. There isn't a single 'G' Division mount north of Fort Resolution. By the time I see a horse again, I'll probably have forgotten how to ride. I'll climb aboard Injun style and try to steer him by his tail."

The sergeant was glad to hear the crunch of steps upon the snow. Under the circumstances, he was in no mood for persiflage and more than willing to give up the bluff that seemed required. He stifled a sigh of relief as La Marr ushered in the missionaries.

A quiet couple, plain, both a trifle frail-looking for Arctic rigors, the Morrows proved to be. Serious as they were about "The Work" to which they were prepared to give years of sacrifice, both were "regulars" in the life of the North. Scarcely would they wait to warm up before insisting on helping their hosts prepare supper. Moira, too, insisted on having a hand. The lean-to kitchen refused to hold them all, however, so Seymour

cited the "too many cooks" rule and discharged all but Mrs. Morrow.

The meal which soon was on the oilcloth was more substantial than formal. It consisted of warmed-up soup from a great kettle that held a week's supply at a time, then sizzling carabou steaks, sour-dough bread, boiled beans and bacon and, of course, marmalade from distant England. It was the sort of menu that "sticks to the ribs" gratefully after a day in the open. When Karmack came in for his promised coffee, he found the post gayer than ever he had known it to be. Yet, for three of them buoyancy was as forced as jiggling at a wake.

With tact increased by the fear that some chance slip would disclose to their lovely guest the news that he felt temporarily should be kept from her, Sergeant Seymour discovered that the ladies were worn by their long run in the biting cold. He threw open the door of "officers' room," disclosing a wood fire crackling in a Yukon stove and two bunks spread with blankets fresh from the post's reserve supply.

"Not much to offer as a guest room, but our one

best bet," he apologized. "I'll confess frankly that there isn't a single bunk-sheet in the detachment. But I think I can guarantee a sound sleep for both of you. I'll promise there'll be no breakfast alarm in the morning, but the makings of a meal will be beside the kitchen stove when you're ready."

Protest unexpected came from mild-mannered Mrs. Morrow. "But we're routing you out of house and home, sergeant," she exclaimed. With a nod of her blond head, she indicated an extra uniform which dangled from a hook against the wall, tell-tale staff stripes upon its crimson sleeve.

"A dreadful thing to do," added Moira. "And on your first night home after your long patrol!"

That portion of Seymour's face that was not bearded took color from the tunic that had betrayed him. "And I thought I'd removed all trace of the former occupant. Must be getting color blind." He carried the jacket into the living room. "Don't worry about your reverend, Mrs. Morrow; he'll bunk as snug as a bug out here with La Marr and me," he called back.

There was a chorus of good-nights; then the men

settled to their pipes before the fireplace. After a reasonable wait in silence, Seymour lowered his voice and communicated to Luke Morrow the news of the tragedy. Without reservation, the missionary approved their course of keeping it from Moira until after the necessary legal formalities had been carried out. Then, he said, he would take charge with a religious reverence that might lighten the blow.

"She's a wonderful woman, Moira O'Malley," he said with deep feeling. "She endeared herself to everyone who met her over at Wolf Lake. Utterly wrapped up in her brother, this will be a terrible blow. I wonder if——" He hesitated. "Would it be admissible, do you think, to tell her of the death but not the fearful form?"

Glances exchanged by the three laymen showed that they appreciated the missionary's struggle—kindly thought against strict truthfulness. Long had he taught the "truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." But just now he wavered.

"By gar! It absolutely would!" Karmack vociferated.

Seymour's quick wit worked out a solution.

"An accident of the Aretie prairies. I'll trust having that one marked up against me in the Doomsday Book."

"Blessed are the kindly of heart," murmured the "sky-pilot." "So be it!"

Of course, they all realized that Moira would learn in time the nature of the "accident," but that need not be until Time had its chance to salve the wound. The arrest of Avic need not bring about disclosure, once the whites in Armistice were pledged to keep it from her. She might know him only as another unfortunate, misguided Eskimo slayer, a handeuff brother to Olespe of the Lady Franklin band, then in the guard room.

"But Mrs. Morrow?" The thought came suddenly to Seymour that the woman missionary spoke some Eskimo. "She'll hear of it from the natives."

Luke Morrow smiled; they did not know of the iron which was in the make-up of his little blond wife as he did.

"She is a good woman, so mereiful. I will pray this out with her in the morning."

For a time, gloomy silence held the group

around the fireplace. Suddenly Karmack leaned over and grasped Morrow almost roughly by the shoulder.

"Parson, do you know why that girl left her father and the comparative comforts of a British Columbia gold camp to share a trader's shack in bleak Armistice with her brother?"

The trader's demand scarcely could have been more vehement had he personally resented Moira's coming. "I know that he did not expect her. What's more, he never even spoke of having a sister."

The missionary's calm was perfect.

"She had no way of letting him know that she was coming to spend the winter with him, once the wireless she sent to Edmonton failed to reach Wolf Lake," he replied. "She came through herself by team in the first storm of winter. We had great difficulty in keeping her with us until we ourselves were ready to make the trip across country. She'd have come through with an Indian dog driver if we had not protested so stoutly."

"All that to see a brother, eh?" snorted Karmack. "Are you certain she is his sister?"

Seymour sprang to his feet, an angry glitter in his gray eyes. "Enough of that, Karmaek! Express another such doubt and out you go—for good."

For a moment, a snarling expression strove to master the trader's face. The missionary poured oil.

"I'm sure Mr. Karmaek meant nothing wrong. He's just a bit upset by all these happenings."

"Upset? Dear eyes, yes—I'll say I'm upset." The factor made a quick grasp for peace, for the sergeant looked dangerous. "All I meant was that I could understand a wife going to such an effort to join a husband, but not a sister."

"Any reason to believe Oliver O'Malley had a wife?" Seymour remained stern.

"None in the world. But a sister—— To make a trip like that, she must have had some very pressing reason." Again his eyes questioned the parson.

"If there existed any other than sisterly affection," said Morrow evenly, "she did not express it to me." His manner was so final as to make further questioning discourteous.

Clumsily as Karmaek had used his probe, he had

but echoed a query that had been in Seymour's mind from his first realization of Moira's superlative comeliness. The sergeant had meant to ask about this when he and Morrow were alone, and he would have put his question without giving offense.

Why had one who deserved to be the honored toast of the Dominion rushed into the Arctic wilds, evidently unmasked, certainly unexpected, at a time of year when it would be next to impossible to send her back?

Was there any connection between her coming and what had occurred so recently in the Eskimo hut? Had she brought a warning of some sort to this beloved brother and been lulled into thinking she might delay for a missionary escort and still be in time to serve and save him?

Those rapid-fire speculations, unvoiced, seemed to advise only negative answers. Yet why had she come?

Constable La Marr, who had been silent all evening to a point of moodiness, now snapped Seymour from his thoughts with a question of his own.

“And when are you going to turn me loose after that accursed Avic?” he demanded in a tone that was scarcely subordinate.

The missionary looked up at his violence, but had no censure for the speech of it. These men who give their lives to lighten the Arctic native’s sorry burden grow accustomed to strong language.

“At daybreak you will take the dogs, mush over to Prospect, and subpoena those three mining engineers wintering there to serve on coroner’s jury. Bring them back with you. Miss O’Malley need know of only one inquest.” He glanced with thoughtful eyes toward the closed door of the inner room. “After that——”

One look at the young constable’s face must have told any who saw it that Avic, the Eskimo, would need to hide like a weasel to escape that arm of the law.

CHAPTER V

SILVER AND BLACK

LA MARR was away at dawn with a *venire facias* for each of the three gold explorers, the only competent jurors within reach. As it was a matter of forty miles' rough sledding to the prospectors' camp and return, the inquests could scarcely be held before the late afternoon. That the girl whose emotions they were conspiring to protect might be too busy for vagrant suspicions, Sergeant Seymour suggested to the Morrows that they open up Mission House while he was at liberty to help them.

"Don't want to seem inhospitable, Mrs. Morrow," he said in his slowest, most deferential manner, "and you know you'll be welcome here as long as you care to stay, but I'm sure you want to get into your own place as soon as possible. Never know when some Arctic hades is going to cut loose and take me out on the trail. I'm off duty this morning—more than ready to help with the heavy work."

This brought an offer from Moira O'Malley that struck the hearts of those who knew.

"Our sergeant of the Dismounted is positively brilliant this morning," she said, confounding him utterly with twin flashes of Irish blue. "Why, all the time I attended school in Ottawa, I saw no one more considerate. You see, when Oliver gets back from this inconsiderate mush of his, I'll become quite useless as your handmaiden, Emma, with all the things a brother will be needing done for him."

Mrs. Morrow had not been advised of the true situation, but she had her own ideas as to the proper habitat in an outland's camp for a girl like Moira.

"Oh, you'll keep right on living at Mission House as long as you're here, my dear," she said. "The shack of a bachelor trader is no place for so dashing a belle."

"But I know Olie's quarters, whatever they are, will need my sisterly attentions," she protested, spreading unconscious agony to the two men. "His room at home always was a sight. A place for

everything but nothing in its place seemed to be that Mick's motto."

As the two men went on ahead to the small dwelling that had been closed since the previous spring thaw, Seymour found himself asking again why she had come. Were sisters as devoted as that? As motherly? Never having had a sister, he was unable to answer.

The pair stripped weather boarding from doors and windows, aired the house thoroughly and carried in a supply of wood from the shed. They then closed it tight and built roaring fires in every available stove to remove the winter chill. The native hostler from the post already had shoveled paths through the snow.

So far as the two males could see, but little inside cleaning would be necessary. But the women, on coming to the house presently, revised that verdict and fell to with broom and mop.

The smoke from Mission House stove-pipes probably had been reported to Karmack, for he arrived presently, his interpreter drawing a toboggan loaded with provisions which were presented to the missionaries with compliments from the trading

company. The gift was gracious, the supplies being of a sort not found in the somewhat meager store of staples provided by the societies. They were gratefully received.

Came then a second shock from Moira, again an innocent one, in the form of coupled questions.

"But Mr. Karmack, have you locked the store?" she asked first.

"Not much trade these wintry days and if customers come, they'll stick around like summer bull-flies." He accomplished the only laugh of the morning.

"But who is there to tell Oliver, when he comes back, that I've arrived and am waiting?"

Harry Karmack's freshly shaved, usually ruddy face went as white as the girl's natural pallor at this unexpected turn to his attempted whimsicality. He staggered back as if she had struck him a blow. Seymour, standing near, steadied him into a chair.

"That bad heart of yours again, old top?" the sergeant asked quietly.

No one ever had heard of anything being the matter with Karmack's heart, but the timely question served to cover his emotion. Mrs. Morrow

noticed it, but did not wonder thereat. Evidently Moira had hit these sons of isolation hard, and there were in prospect interesting sessions, she thought, for Mission House living room that winter.

Seymour decided he had endured enough agony for one morning and so, on the plea of police routine, started for the post. But the thumbscrew of misadventure was to receive one more turn. From the door of Mission House the melodious voice of Moira carried to him.

"Oh, Sergeant Scarlet, please do keep an eye open for my merry brother along Rideau Street, or whatever you call the thoroughfare which passes your headquarters."

"And I'll have him paged at the Chateau Laurier and ask for him out at Britannia Park," he managed to answer in terms of the city of her schooling. But he had no heart for the jest, mindful of the change that soon must come to her happy mood.

He entered the police shack by the back door and looked in for a moment on Olespe. His prisoner from Lady Franklin oblivious of his fate, seemed to revel in the luxury of the guard room's

warmth. The sergeant went through and out the front way.

“Rideau Street indeed,” ran his thoughts. “What a name for that streak through the snow in Armistice!”

At that, Moira showed that she knew her Ottawa, for Rideau is the street on which face the red brick headquarters of the Royal Mounted. Would that she had never left the capital! Would that he could waft her home again, sacrifice though that would be in this ice-bound isolation!

Straight to Avic’s hut he went and broke the seal upon the door, as was his right. Again his eyes were upon all that remained of her “merry brother.” He wondered about death and the hereafter and various things that never should enter a Mountie’s mind—not when he’s stationed north of Sixty-six.

Then, suddenly, his eyes seemed to open as though a mote had been cast from each. Perhaps this was effected by the magic of Moira’s charm and beauty. Certainly he saw details that had not impressed him the previous afternoon.

As might a wolverine in defense of her young,

he pounced upon the silver fox pelt that lay on the sleeping bench beside the murdered youth—lay in such a way as to indicate its purchase had already been negotiated. He studied the set of the fur and sniffed at the tanning on the inner side. His eyes widened as he held the beautiful exhibit before him and realized the possibilities that were opened up by this definite clue.

“Magic skin,” he murmured half aloud after the fashion of men who find themselves often alone in the wilderness. “You widen the mystery; may you help to close it!”

Gently, without shrinking from the cold touch, he removed the last clutch of O'Malley's fingers from the black fox—probably the pelt of ostensible contention. Close examination of this showed the same conditions to exist.

Neither of the foxes had been trapped in the present winter; both had been cured at least a year.

“Magic skin,” he repeated, and breathed a wish too fervent for utterance even in the hut where he stood alone.

In the act of wishing, memory put its finger on him. There came to mind that famous tale of

Balzac's, "The Magic Skin." The story dealt with the hide of an ass which, with every wish invoked from it, shrank until the greedy owner was threatened with the disappearance of his magic possession.

Perhaps Seymour had best cease wishing. But he recalled he had a pair of magic skins in hand; grew defiant of the venerable myth, and wished again, more fervently even than before that it would fall to his lot to solve the deepened mystery of the Oliver O'Malley murder.

Opening the pea jacket of his winter uniform, he tucked both furs beneath his tunic. Closing and resealing the hut, he strode back to the police cabin. Had he intended to appropriate the silver and black treasures for his own gain, he scarcely could have hidden them more carefully.

CHAPTER VI

REGARD FOR THE LAW

NOWHERE in the civilized world, perhaps, is there more respect paid to the coroner and his inquests than in the Dominion of Canada. This regard is not confined to the settled provinces, but reaches beyond the Arctic Circle even to the farthestmost post of the Royal Mounted in latitude 76—Ellesmere Island, on the edge of the Polar Sea. This afternoon in Armistice was being devoted to the ancient formality of the law.

As one of the miners, brought in by Constable La Marr from Prospect to serve as juryman, put it in half-hearted protest to Seymour:

“You red coats would hold an inquest at the North Pole if word came to you that some one was violently dead up there.”

In his capacity as coroner, Sergeant Seymour first called the inquest over Mrs. Olespe, whose Eskimo name was too complicated with gutturals for English pronunciation. Upon chairs and one

of the bunks in the living room of the post sat the jury—the three gold hunters from Prospect and Factor Karmack. At a table beside his superior was Constable La Marr, acting as clerk of court.

The prisoner, more stolid than sullen, was brought in from the guard room and planted on another of the bunks beside Koplock, the interpreter who regularly served the Arctic Traders.

Seymour's first difficulty was to make certain that Olespe understood the warning that had been given him at the time of his arrest, for he had not entirely trusted the ability of the volunteer translator who had served him up North.

"Ask him if he knows who the Royal Canadian Mounted Police are," was the first address to the interpreter.

There followed verbal explosions back and forth.

"Olespe says they are the rich men of the country," reported the interpreter.

Shrugging his shoulders over the apparent hopelessness of the situation, Seymour tried again: "Ask him what he thinks the police came into the country for."

"To make us unhappy," came the report presently.

"In what way—unhappy?"

"By not let us shoot at what is ours to shoot and which we can hit."

Feeling that he was making progress, the sergeant got to the vital point. "Ask him what I said to him when I put him under arrest?"

"He says," translated the interpreter, "you told him he'd get hurt if he talked too much."

Seymour decided to let it go at that and led the way to the outbuilding used as morgue. There Olespe identified the remains of his wife, which had been sledged so many snowy miles because there was no possibility of finding a white jury nearer. The Eskimo added indifferently what was translated into "She no good wife."

Back in the station the sergeant told of his investigations at the scene of the crime, listed possible witnesses and summarized their version of a tragedy all too common among the Eskimo who are prone to the *ménage à trois*. The jury promptly brought in a verdict against Olespe, and Seymour, in his capacity of magistrate, held him to trial.

They were ready then for the second case of the day, the formal inquiry into the death of Oliver O'Malley. As Karmack was to be the most important witness, a change was made in the jury by substituting for him the recently arrived missionary. With these four and his constable clerk, Seymour went down the trail to the hut which Avic had occupied. That Karmack elected to stick by the stove at the post until the jury returned caused the coroner-sergeant secret rejoicing. He saw to it that La Marr did not enter the hut. The jury, seeing the interior for the first time, did not miss the fox-pelt clews which he had appropriated that morning.

Karmack and the Eskimo relative who had loaned Avic the hut, gave the only testimony. This the jury held sufficient on which to find a verdict against the fox hunter and when the fact had been duly recorded the coroner's court was declared closed.

The saddest task of the day was at hand—one from which these strong men shrank, but which none was ready to shirk. Presently a strange procession came up the trail from the hut of tragedy.

In the lead was the police team of malamutes, with La Marr beside the foremost dog, holding him by leash to a dignified pace. They drew a sled carrying a blanketed burden. This vehicle Seymour steadied with the aid of a gee-pole. The prospectors and Harry Karmack brought up in the rear with bowed heads.

The way led, naturally, to the newly opened Mission House at the door of which Morrow met them. The dogs were unhitched and taken away by La Marr. The others picked up the sled and carried it into one of the bedrooms. From another room could be heard stifled sobs and words of comfort. Moira O'Malley knew, then, that her sisterly rush into the Frozen North, whatever its real object, had been in vain. The missionary's wife had broken the news of death without the real detail and now was comforting her.

On returning to the post, Seymour was momentarily surprised to see that the police dog team had been hitched to another sled—this one lightly loaded. The native hostler was holding them in waiting. Inside he found La Marr pacing the floor like some animal tenant of a zoo.

"Where away, Charlie?" he asked.

"After Avic. I'm just waiting for you to issue the warrant. You promised me the chance at him, you must remember."

"But why to-night?"

The constable gave him an impatient glance. "I can make that Eskimo camp on Musk-ox to-night; I'll be that far on my way. Haven't we lost time enough through my mistake?"

It took but a moment for Seymour to issue the warrant charging one Avic, Eskimo, with the murder by strangulation of Oliver O'Malley, which was in accord with the verdict.

"Remember the motto of the Force, young fellow," he cautioned as he handed over the document.

La Marr stuffed it into a pocket underneath his *parkee*.

"Aye—get me man!"

"Not that," said his superior with a frown. "It's 'Never fire first!' See that you bring Avic back alive. There's more depends on that than you know."

The constable looked startled. "You don't

mean—— Why it's an open and shut case. The coroner's jury——”

“Bring Avic back alive, that's all. Good luck.”

La Marr squared himself for a formal salute and went out into the gathering dusk. He had his orders.

CHAPTER VII

WANTED—AN ESKIMO FOX

AFTER the excitement attending his return from the North patrol, the short winter days and the far longer nights passed slowly for the O. C. of Armistice detachment, now reduced to commanding himself. One week—two weeks—part of a third had been crossed off the calendar without any word coming from his man-hunting constable. Seymour wasn't exactly worrying yet, but he was beginning to wish he had not been so generous about giving young La Marr this chance to redeem himself.

Above all else he desired the custody of Avic, the fox hunter. The body of the accused Eskimo would not satisfy him; no more would a report of his death. Nothing would do but Avic in the quick.

Often in the endless evenings, while intermittent blizzards raged about the shuttered windows, he would take out the black and silver pelts. From various angles he would argue their bearing on the

case. More than ever was he assured that they were not of recent trapping. The fur was that of animals which had been through a long, easy winter—one when rabbits had been plentiful. This was not a rabbit winter on the arctic prairies east of the Mackenzie.

These particular foxes had been trapped in the early spring, or he was no judge of fur quality. That this spring had not been the previous one was shown by the seasoned state of the tanning. However, this tanning did not appear to be Eskimo work, but that of Indian squaws further south.

Every Eskimo has a flock of cousins. He had visited several in the immediate vicinity who claimed more or less of that relationship to the missing Avic. He had examined the work of their women on furs. A pronounced difference in process seemed evident to him.

The film of mystery brought into the O'Malley murder by his own knowledge of Eskimo strangling had been intensified into a shroud by his study of the exhibits he had secreted. Yet, speculate as he would, there was no other apparent line of suspicion than that of the native's guilt. He

was at loss how to proceed until he had questioned the man for whom the warrant had been issued.

Each time he looked at the pelts, one outstanding fact came to mind:

No Eskimo ever held a pelt, after his woman had cured it, longer than it took to get to the handiest trader. It was against all rhyme and reason that two fox pelts, worth many times their weight in gold, would remain in the hands of a ne'er-do-well like Avic so long after they were marketable. How, then, had the native come by them?

Under ordinary circumstances—rather, under the amity of suffer-isolation-together which had existed prior to the tragedy, he might have gone to Harry Karmack with his problem. At least, the factor could have given him an expert's opinion as to when the skins had become pelts by virtue of trapping and tanning.

But a breach yawned between the two—one unwittingly caused by the fair addition to the limited population of Armistice. It wasn't an open one, so far, but both knew that it existed and bridging it was the last thought of either. They

were unadmitted rivals for the favor of Moira O'Malley. Anyone who knew the man, could have read the sergeant's interest in his countenance. Contrary to winter practice of toilers of the trails, his face had been clean shaved from the morning after La Marr's departure. The trader, on his part, showed intensity of his heart-hurt by countless little attentions to the young woman.

The unfortunate brother had been laid away upon the highest knoll near the camp after a simple service conducted by Rev. Morrow. The girl had held up under her bereavement with a courage that commanded all their admiration. No hint of the real cause of Oliver's death had reached her, so guarded had been the four resident whites who knew. From the Eskimo, of course, she learned nothing. She had accepted the report of an "accident of the Arctic" and had asked no embarrassing questions as to details. The finality of death seemed to suffice; nothing else mattered.

A week after the funeral, a stranger would not have known from her manner that suddenly she had been deprived of one of her dearest relatives. She never spoke of having a philosophy of life, but

something of the sort seemed to sustain her. Her whole behavior indicated that she was determined not to make others unhappy with her personal grief. They all had their lives to live in a location that made life difficult. Moira O'Malley would do her utmost to make the winter as happy as might be. She did not even ask if it were not possible to send her "Outside," now that the reason for her presence had been removed by Fate.

Harry Karmack, bearing a book to Mission House in the hope that gloomy thought might be diverted thereby, had been the first of the rivals to discover her mental attitude. He had been prompt to act on his important discovery. Besides the volume, he left an invitation to dinner for the girl and her hosts. Sergeant Russell Seymour, official head of the tiny community, was not among those present, having received no invitation.

Now, this was a breach of camp etiquette which could not be overlooked. Far worse than the cut direct, it was nearly as much an insult as a blow in the face. When a handful of whites are segregated in a bronze man's country, they naturally cling to each other as they do to the "alders." Everyone

possibly within the pale is invited to everything that approaches a function. Even squaw-men are asked to attend if they retain a semblance of presentability.

There was no possible question that Factor Harry Karmack's dinner was a function. Although it had never been mentioned by Moira or the Morrows, the sergeant had all the details. These had been relayed by his native hostler who had them direct from the Arctic's interpreter, the latter having acted as butler for the all-important occasion. The meal had been served in courses, mind you, for the first time in the history of the camp. The factor's store of delicacies, even to the tinned plum pudding, intended for the Christmas feast, had been freely broached.

Seymour could not hope to equal such a spread from police rations, but he was not to be outdone in hospitality. Miss O'Malley and the Morrows had accepted his invitation to a sour-dough luncheon. The factor had not accepted for an excellent reason that you probably can imagine.

The three from Mission House were coming this very noon and the sergeant had been occupied part

of the morning correcting the haphazard house-keeping of quarters. In fact, they had come, as was attested by the knocking upon the front door.

More lovely than ever Moira seemed to him as she returned a smile to his enthusiastic greetings. She was dressed to-day entirely in white, the first time he had ever seen her in anything but black.

"What a snow bird you are, Moira!" he exclaimed, almost forgetting to greet the missionaries.

"In that case, I'm relieved you're not packing a gun, Sergeant Scarlet."

"Not even side arms," he said, releasing his whimsical smile. "I'm the one that's wounded—fluttering. Put your wraps in the tent, all of you, and I'll put you to work."

For the first time they noticed the stage-setting he had created for his social bow. Every stick of furniture had been removed and the floor covered with reindeer moss, gray, soft and fragrant. Two reserve sleds, padded with outspread sleeping bags, were evidently intended to serve as seats. The "tent" to which he had referred them was a drape of canvas over the door leading into his own room. About the hearth were scattered pots, pans and

dishes of tin. The fireplace glowed like a camp fire permitted to grow dim for culinary service.

"So this is what you meant by a sour-dough party," observed Mrs. Morrow, her voice betraying her enthusiasm over the idea.

"Wonder if I'm hard-bitten enough by now to get the idea?" Moira asked them.

"We're hitting the trail," explained the missionary. "We've just pitched camp and are about to make muck-muck. As Northwesterners never pack grub for idle hands to eat, we'd better strip off our coats and get into action."

Where the fire glowed the hottest, Seymour rigged an iron spit from which he suspended a shank of caribou on a wire as supple as a piece of string. Beneath, he placed a pan to catch the drippings. To Moira he entrusted a second wire so attached that an occasional pull kept the meat turning.

"There's nothing more delicious than roast caribou," he advised her, "and this is the very best way to roast it."

Luke Morrow was to attend the broiling of a dozen fool-hens—a variety of grouse—which the

sergeant had shot that morning. To Mrs. Emma was assigned the task of picking over a mess of fiddle-head ferns which, by some magic, he had kept fresh since fall. He was certain that, when properly boiled, they would produce a dish of greens more delicate than spinach.

“And you, Russell?” queried the girl, for they soon had taken to first names, except that she sometimes called him “Sergeant Scarlet.” “Because of your rank, I suppose you’ll merely boss the job and eat twice as much as anyone else.”

He did not answer, but fell to his knees beside the open mouth of a flour sack. With the aid of water and an occasional pinch of baking powder, he quickly mixed a wad of dough. Greasing a gold-pan with a length of bacon rind, he filled it with the dough and stood it up facing the fire.

“I’m baking bannock,” he answered Moira’s quizzical look. “When the outside is browned, I’ll toss it like a pancake, and soon we’ll have a better bread than mother ever made.”

The primitive feast at last was ready and they fell upon it seated tailor-fashion upon the moss. The caribou was so tender, remarked Rev. Morrow

in complimenting the fair spit attendant, that you could put your finger through it.

"Don't waste time putting anything through it but your teeth," remarked their host.

Later, when they had turned to moss berries and condensed "cow," provided as a typical desert, Moira expressed regret that Seymour's attractive young constable was not present to share the feast.

"Have you heard anything from La Marr, Seymour?" asked the missionary.

"Not a word."

Something in his tone startled the girl. "Has he gone on a dangerous mission?" she asked. "Are you worried about him?"

The sergeant shook his head. "He's one of the trail-boys and will find others to stand by if he's in trouble." And after a moment's silence, he quoted:

"The cord that ties the trail-boys has lashed
Them heart to heart;
No stage presents their joys, no actors
Play their parts;
Their struggles are seldom known, because
Through wilds untrod
These daring spirits roam where there is
Naught but God."

The spell of silence that followed his pronouncement of the Deity was rudely broken by a hammering on the outer door. So peremptory was the summons that Seymour sprang to his feet, crossed the room and flung the door open, only to start back in amazement.

“Avic of the foxes, by all that’s holy!” he exclaimed.

Framed in the doorway, his small eyes peering from a strained face out of the wolverine hood of his *parkee*, the fugitive Eskimo stood alone. Instead of handcuffs on his wrists, he held a rifle across his breast.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HERO FUGITIVE

As the sergeant moved forward intent upon seizing the rifle, the huge, raw-boned Kogmollyc came into the room with a bound that carried him well over the threshold. The move had every appearance of an attack of one demented; but before Seymour could grapple with him the lack of hostile intent was made manifest.

The rifle Avic carried was thrown regardlessly to the floor. With a snarl inhuman, the Eskimo threw himself down beside the platter of caribou roast. The odors of cooked food had proved too much for racial restraint. Hunger had brought on the precipitate action.

For several minutes, Seymour and his guests stood and watched the fugitive with amazement. He went at the deer shank after the fashion of a starving malamute. Sinking his teeth into the succulent meat, he tore out great mouthfuls which he swallowed without chewing. At first growls were

interspersed between the bites, but gradually these were succeeded by grunts of satisfaction. Once he dropped the shank to fill his mouth with bannock, but he returned to the meat, sucking at it while yet his mouth was crowded.

Seymour stooped for the gun, recognized it as a service weapon and grew suddenly grave.

"La Marr's rifle," he muttered.

Crossing to the native, he gripped the back-thrown hood of the *parkee* and dragged him, sputtering protestingly, to his feet. Avic was considerable to lift, but Seymour was strong and deeply aroused. The caribou shank came with the savage, held in teeth that demanded a last bite.

"Here, you dog, drop that!" came gruff command. "Want to founder yourself?"

Morrow, too, recognized the danger of overloading a stomach long deprived of food, took hold of the meat and tore it away from the Eskimo.

"But surely they'll let him eat more later?" asked Moira of Mrs. Morrow in a hushed tone.

Seymour spoke rapidly to the missionary, asking him to go to the trading post for the interpreter.

In some way, the Eskimo grasped the gist of this request.

"Avic, he speak them Engleesh," was his surprising statement.

"Then tell me, where you get this gun?" Seymour demanded. "Where is the red coat that owns him?" Unwittingly he had fallen into the broken speech of the few natives who know other than their own tongue.

Avic grinned widely, showing ivory fangs, in the openings between which shreds of meat still hung.

"Him hungry all same me," he said. "Him out there——" He gestured to the front door which one of the women had closed. "——stay by sled."

Something about this reply seemed to tickle the native for he laughed until the loose folds of his *parkee* rippled. Neither Seymour nor Morrow waited to learn the reason for the mirth, but dashed out the door.

In the furrowed trail they found La Marr, holding the dogs with difficulty, for they recognized they were at trail's end. The constable was in his sleeping bag which was lashed to the *koinatik*. He

had "stay by sled" for an excellent reason. His leg was broken.

"Well, Charlie, I see you got your man," said Seymour, by way of being cheerful, as he steadied the sled which the dogs, under Morrow's guidance, were pulling up the bank into the yard.

"No, Serg., me man got me." The response was in a voice weak from suffering.

They carried him into the house, sleeping bag and all. Before attempting the painful ordeal of extracting the broken, unset limb from the fur-lined sack, they fed him the breast of one of the fool hens that had been left from the interrupted feast. At Seymour's request, the two women went into the kitchen to prepare hot water for the impending operation and a strong broth of which the constable would be in need afterward.

As every missionary in the North is something of a surgeon as well as a lay physician, Luke Morrow hurried to Mission House for his kit. The while, Avic sat on the hearth, contentedly munching a chunk of bannock which no one had the heart to take away from him.

When the room was cleared, Sergeant Seymour

leaned over his constable for a low-voiced question. "Is Avic under arrest?"

"I—I hadn't the heart, after all he's done for me," said the injured mountie. "He brought me along willingly enough. Didn't seem the least afraid about coming back to the post. Go easy on him, sergeant. I'd have been wolf food if it hadn't been for him."

The arrest had to be made quickly, before Moira chanced back into the room if their kind-hearted plot was to be sustained. Seymour got the Eskimo's attention, reminded him that he understood English, and went through the formal lines of arrest and warning, with the addition that it was "for the murder of Oliver O'Malley."

"Sure," said the native, who had learned some of his English from American whalers at Herschel Island. "I savey. What do? When we go?"

Seymour did not understand the significance of this last question, but hadn't the time to inquire into it. Leading Avic to the guard room, he turned him in to make friends with Olespe or not, as Eskimo etiquette might decree.

As he was locking the door of the cell room,

Moira came from the kitchen with improvised splints and a roll of bandages. She told him quietly of her service in France with a Red Cross unit and asked permission to help with the operation.

"If I can handle the ether or anything——"

"Thank you, Moira," the sergeant interrupted.

"If Dr. Morrow can use you, I'll call."

The parson-surgeon returned with medicine and instrument cases. The sleeping bag was slit down its top-center, as the least painful way of removing the patient, and gently they carried him to an improvised operating table in Seymour's quarters.

Morrow proposed an anæsthetic. Even in the hands of a skilled surgeon, he declared, the bone-setting would be most painful; he was just a clumsy, well-intentioned amateur.

"Damme if I'll go out of my head for just a jab of pain," the doughty constable exclaimed.

"A whiff of ether will make it easier, Charlie," suggested his superior. "And I'll whisper a secret—Miss O'Malley is ready to administer it. She served with us in France."

La Marr's black eyes gleamed a second in appreciation. Then he shook his head decisively.

"Aye, and that wouldn't be so bad," he said. "But I've smelled the sweet stuff before. When I am coming out of it I tell all I know. We'll take no chances of ragging her with babbling about Oliver's murder." He turned to Morrow. "Let's go, parson, and do your darndest to make me a straight leg."

The operation took some time, the break being a compound requiring a preliminary reduction. In this Moira did help and perhaps her presence was as potent as anæsthesia. At any rate, not a cry escaped the lips of the broken Mountie.

When the splints finally were fastened and the patient refreshed with a cup of fool-hen broth, Seymour asked an account of the pursuit and accident.

"If you'll hand my jacket—wrote report when I thought we wouldn't pull through." He passed over his note book. "I want to sleep now."

In the living room, the sergeant bent over this blurred scrawl in pencil:

Sert. Seymour, O. C.
Armistice Detachment.

Sir: I have the honor to report:

Followed fugitive from one camp to another, always a jump or two behind him. Seemed not to know where he was headed. Ate all my own supplies. Took to Eskimo grub. Not so worse after stomach gets used. Three days ago, crossing lake on gladed ice. Think it was Lake Blarney. Dogs sight a stray wolf. Run away. Sled swerves into fishing hole. Me thrown into water. Leg broken. Make edge of ice and crawl out. Can't go farther. Dogs catch, kill and eat wolf. Come back looking for me, but not near enough so I can swing on sled.

Am freezing to death when come Avic over my trail. For why? He makes camp in spruce, builds fire, tries to fix leg best he can. Asks, "Where go?" I say Armistice. We start. Blizzard comes; grub goes. Can't find cache. May be we get through chewing leather,—maybe not.

Can't make Avic as O'Malley's strangler. Gentle as a woman with me. He's not under arrest, but trying his darndest to get me back to post. If blizzard holds, neither of us will. Maybe this reach you some day.

Respect.,

C. LA MARR,

Constable R.C.M.P.

Returning to the improvised hospital to ask a question or two needed to fill in gaps in the report, Seymour found Moira sitting beside the bed, stroking the fevered brow with her strong, white hands. She raised one in caution. The patient was asleep.

CHAPTER IX

THE SKEIN TANGLES

PARTIAL explanation of Avic's queer behavior came next morning from the Eskimo himself. After breakfast, but before Moira had arrived to undertake her tour of nursing La Marr, Seymour brought the suspect out for examination. The Huskie beat him to the first question.

"When we go?"

Remembering that this identical inquiry had been last voiced by the native the previous afternoon, the sergeant surmised that it must have some significance.

"Go—go where?" he asked. "Where do you expect to go, Avic?"

The Eskimo made a sweeping gesture in a southerly direction. "Up big river," he mumbled gutturally. "See all world. Ride in smoke wagon on land, same like steamboat on water. Live in stone house, big as mountain. Good grub. Long sleeps. Warm like summer all time."

"And why should all that good luck come to you?" Seymour demanded. "Who's been putting such fool ideas into your head?"

Avic looked puzzled. There were words in the sergeant's questions that were new to him. The officer was about to simplify his query when the native blurted out the desired information, evidently sensing that some support was needed by his expectations.

"Nanatalmute boys, she kill white man. Red policeman take boys on long trip. Treat her fine, them boys. Stay away two, three freeze-up. Come back big mens."

Seymour groaned inwardly as he grasped the reference. The Nanatalmutes were the Eskimo who roam the Arctic foreshore to the west of the Mackenzie River. Some years ago an abusive trader had been killed by two youths of the tribe. The authorities of that day decided they should be taken "Outside" for trial. The court developed certain extenuating circumstances which resulted in penitentiary sentences for the pair. In prison, they learned to speak English and were given mechanical training. At term's end, they were

returned to their band in this land of "midnight suns and noonday nights."

Theorists held that the two would spread a respect for the white man's greatness and power—that their tales of punishment would make the land safe for the interlopers of another race. The effect, Seymour well knew, had been different. The Nanatalmutes had reported that they had been royally treated. They described the wonders of provincial cities, the thrills of the railway travel, the surprising warmth, the palatial house in which they lived and countless other details that had impressed their childlike minds. Almost, did this mistake of the Law put a premium on white murder, so great was the envy of the two who had turned punishment into signal honor.

So this was Avic's motive for the murder of young O'Malley! Seymour had the native's word that he expected a trip "Outside." The only implication was practically an admission of guilt.

The sergeant knew that procedure had changed. Courts now were sent into the farthest North and trials held at or near the crime's locale. Conviction in Avic's case would more likely mean a hang-

ing, with his fellows looking on, than a pleasure jaunt anywhere. But of this he did not speak. Even this practical admission from the native did not convince him that the Huskie alone was responsible for the killing. His own deductions from the situation in the hut were too well grounded and vivid.

“When we go?” Again came the query from the eager native, this repetition sharpened with impatience.

“Not soon,” answered Seymour with a shrug; then suddenly turned the inquiry. “Where did you get those fox skins you show to the factor?”

“Avic trap foxes—black and silver,” came the ready answer. “Avic fine hunter—ver’ best.”

“When did you take them from your traps?”

Seymour considered this question vital. He was convinced that the skins had been cured many months before. If the native lied about this, he would feel certain that his sense of mystery had not been misplaced; that there was more behind the murder than Avic’s desire for a trip into the outside world.

The Eskimo did not answer at once. He seemed

to be counting back. The sergeant gave him his time.

"Not count weeks and days," he said at last. "Avic trap 'em when the sun go away and the snow comes."

"You mean just after this winter began?" Seymour wished to guard against any misunderstanding.

"This same winter. Avic cousin wife fix 'em plenty. Avic bring 'em to post. Much travel better than trade-barter from store, so not sell. When we go?"

The sergeant did not press the inquiry at the moment. There was a long, long winter ahead of them in which he hoped the whole truth would out.

Several practical reasons decided his next move. He put both of the accused natives under open arrest. Cell room at police quarters was at a premium and food of the sort the natives required was difficult to prepare in a white man's kitchen. The health of the prisoners, which must be his concern until the court had passed on their guilt, was certain to be better if they lived under native conditions. Friends and relatives were more than

ready to take them in for sustenance allowance he granted each. After making them understand that they were not to leave camp under penalty of his wrath, he turned them loose—a parole, it may be said here, that was not broken.

The happiest weeks in Russell Seymour's memory were those that immediately followed. With his lone constable bedfast, his presence at or near headquarters was required unless some dire emergency rose. For once, he thanked his lucky stars that nothing happened to break the joyous monotony.

For a week, Moira, in her rôle of nurse, spent most of her days at the post. While she was kindness itself to La Marr and anticipated most of his wants, there was no doubt that her real interest was in the sergeant. A close friendship sprang up as they found many interests in common and exchanged life stories with endless detail. At that, each had their mental reservations. Nothing the girl said, for instance, threw any light on her real reason for making her unseasonable and unexpected northward dash. And his lips never hinted that he was hopelessly in love.

In holding back, however, the girl had every advantage over the man. She did not need word of mouth to tell her the state of his feelings. Indeed, her worry was over the promptness of her own heart, as she confided to Emma Morrow. Was propinquity disturbing her judgment, and isolation distorting her viewpoint? She feared a mistake that might make them both unhappy in the future. With a tact that at times made her feel cruel both to him and herself, she held the situation level with the spirit of friendship.

Her attitude was made easy by the more active wooing of Harry Karmack. The handsome factor was not held back by any sense of poverty, which is felt perforce by anyone who had little but his police pay, a far from princely dole. Karmack was as persistent as circumstances and Moira would permit; quite too impetuous, in fact, for the comfort of one whose interests were divided.

For a time, the girl was put to it to keep the two apart. When they both "made" Mission House at the same time, she felt that she was spending the evening in a TNT factory. While the men never actually clashed physically, she felt certain

that only Seymour's military discipline kept them apart. At last, she was forced to put them on schedule, giving each two evenings a week, but with understanding that they were not to come even on their assigned nights unless she previously sent them word. The need for such an expedient could scarcely arise "Outside," but she saw no other way out of the difficulty in Armistice, unless she was ready to undertake a "for-better-or-worse" decision. And out of this situation grew Russell Seymour's greatest despair.

The first of his evenings arrived, but no summons from the Irish beauty. The next afternoon, with Mrs. Morrow, she dropped in at police headquarters to cheer the convalescing constable. She chose a time when she must have known the sergeant was afield exercising the police team of malamutes. Also, according to La Marr, she had not been indisposed the previous evening.

A second of Seymour's scheduled visits passed into the discard of time with no word from her, and then a third. Being an exponent of direct action, Seymour decided to learn the reason for this sudden change which, to him, was unexplain-

able. He made certain she had not started on her daily snow-shoe sprint about the camp, an exercise of which she was fond and at which, for a girl, something of an expert. Mid-afternoon, he presented himself at Mission House. Luke Morrow admitted him; carried his request for an interview.

More anxious than he dared to admit, even to himself, the sergeant waited, his fingers crunching the fur of his cap as he paced the living room. Even before Morrow spoke on returning, he knew the beauty's thumbs were down. The missionary's expression was too sympathetic for any answer.

"Miss O'Malley asks that you'll excuse her, sergeant," was his formal report.

"Is she ill?"

"Not physically, I'm afraid."

Seymour was too dazed for his pride to come into action. To be turned away without a word didn't seem fair. What's more, it wasn't at all like Moira O'Malley. Surely he had the right to know his fault—his crime?

"Thunderin' icebergs, Luke Morrow! Tell me

what I've done to be treated like this?" he demanded.

"I'm sure I can't imagine, Russell."

"Does Madame Emma know?"

The sky-pilot shook his head. "Moirra has not mentioned your name to either of us since the last evening you spent here." He hesitated a moment. "She does know at last that her brother was murdered—that such was the accident of the Arctic we reported to her."

"Then she thinks I'm responsible for trying to soften that ordeal?" Even as he asked, however, he felt certain that there must be something more of a misunderstanding than that.

"I took full responsibility for our not telling her the full details," said Morrow. "You'll remember I first suggested——"

"Then Karmack must have——"

He did not finish, but flung himself out the door. Before the missionary could utter a word of caution or advise moderation, Sergeant Seymour was plowing the trail for the Arctic's establishment.

CHAPTER X

HARD KNUCKLES

IF it is true, as Kipling says, that "single men in barracks don't grow into plaster saints," it is doubly true of the same in lonely detachment shacks of the Royal Mounted scattered about the Arctic foreshore. Living week upon week with the thermometer at the breaking point, with the momentary sun blackened out for days in swirling snow, with a sameness of grub that fairly gnaws the appetite, the wonder is that they carry through with even members of their own outfit.

Suddenly mix in with this condition of life an attractive, unattached, unexpected white woman and you have a yeast more potent than dynamite. Let some outsider stir the mixture with the ladle of false witness and surely the dough overflows the pan.

As he descended upon the trading post and the tricky factor, Russell Seymour was scarcely a staff non-com of the Royal Mounted. For the moment

he was simply a he-man who happened to be encased in the king's scarlet. Even as he was accustomed to express regard for the rights of others, so was he ready to defend his own. A dangerous man for the time being and one with an initial advantage over Karmack, for Seymour's nerve was backed by morality and right.

He did not trouble to knock on the door of the factor's living quarters, but yanked at the latch-string. Finding no one in the comparatively luxurious living room, he stamped into the store, a low-ceilinged 36 x 24. Along one wall were shelves on which were displayed the "junk" that goes to make an Arctic trader's stock. Protecting these notions, generally more than less unsuited for customer's use, was a counter. From the ceiling along the other wall, depended the furs and pelts that had been taken in barter and not yet baled for shipment to the marts of trade where women would pay whatever price the market exacted that they might adorn themselves.

Harry Karmack was there, gloating over some fox skins just taken at a fraction of their value from one of the Indian hunters who had come up

from the South. If he was surprised at the unannounced visit by way of his living quarters, his face did not betray it. It was a perfect mask.

"You've been making yourself quite a stranger, sergeant," he said, his tone pleasant enough. "It's the very devil what a havoc woman can make of man-to-man friendships up here in the Frozen North. Is it possible you've come to whimper at my success with Moira—Miss O'Malley, the finest woman——"

"Not to whimper, Karmack," Seymour cut in.

"Best take your medicine, sergeant. As a mere Arctic cop, on next to nothing a year, you never had a chance to be anything more to her than an entertaining decoration. From now on, you won't even decorate."

Under this insult-to-injury, Seymour held himself with his stoutest grip.

"I came," he declared with an ominous outward calm, "to learn just what you said to Miss O'Malley when you broke our pact of silence about Oliver's murder."

"Oh, I said just that—told her as gently as possible certain facts. It was high time she knew.

Did you expect me to ask your august permission after what has happened?"

The factor put away the pelts he had been examining on Seymour's entry and, with casual manner, came from behind the counter. On the open floor of the store the rivals faced each other.

"You told her more than the facts in this case, Karmack," the sergeant said, his words dragging with earnest emphasis. "I'm here to know what you said and know I will—even if—I am compelled to bash you up."

Karmack laughed harshly, perhaps to show a confidence which he just may have felt, knowing how long-suffering the Mounties are by hard training and practice.

"Threatening violence, eh?" said the factor with a sneer. "Thinking of using your police power to repair your shattered romance? Dear eyes, what a blooming bone to pull!"

"I'm not here as a policeman and I'll lay aside the tools of my trade."

Unhooking the belt that held a holstered revolver to his hip, he placed the accouterments upon the counter at the end nearest the front door. Beside

them he laid a "come along," a small steel article with chain attachment useful in handling refractory prisoners. With his long arms swinging loosely at his sides, he strode back to face the factor.

"Now, Karmack, what else did you tell the girl?"

"Perhaps I showed her how careless kind you are to Avic, named by the coroner's jury as her brother's murderer." The handsome factor was enjoying himself. "Of course it would be likely to please her, seeing the only suspect yet named wandering about the camp at will, living in idleness on your bounty, likely to slope off into the snows and never be heard from again."

"The Eskimo is under open arrest—regular enough under the circumstances. I'll stand——"

Seymour caught himself. He did not need to defend his official conduct to this trouble maker. Moreover, he felt that Karmack must have gone further with his insinuations. The matter and manner of Avic's custody might have carried the girl to him in protest, with demand for an explanation; but it was not enough to have brought about an utter break without a word.

“Let’s hear the rest of it, Karmack—the whole damnable misrepresentation.” Fingers twitching beside the yellow stripe of his trousers showed his tension.

“Perhaps I told her about the foxes—the silver and black!” The factor’s tone was triumphant.

Seymour’s expression was too well schooled to betray any surprise at this unexpected thrust. “What about the fox pelts?”

“They disappeared, didn’t they, most mysteriously? They were in the hut when you left it under seal the night of your return and Moira’s arrival. The hut still was sealed when you took the coroner’s jury there the next day, but the pelts were not. The jury never saw them. That’s what about the fox pelts.”

Seymour’s lips were as white as the freshly drifted snow outside and his voice as cold as the temperature when he asked what the factor meant to insinuate.

“Perhaps the kindest interpretation for you,” Karmack began with gloating insolence, “is that those fox pelts are buying an easy winter for Oliver O’Malley’s slayer with an ultimate get-away in the

spring. In other words, Seymour, you're a disgrace to the uniform you wear—the first I've ever met with. You're a low-down, grafting bribe-taker and to show you how I respect——”

Instead of finishing his tirade, the factor flashed out with his right in a vicious upper-cut. Seymour sensed rather than saw it coming. Having developed a cat-like quickness, he might have dodged and let the blow slide past; but preferred to take it on his jaw of iron. He needed, he felt, the sting of it to release for the deserved punishment of his detractor all the latent powers within his rangy frame.

At once, the hard-knuckled mill was on—a furious battle of males, for this session, primitive males. Science, if either of them knew aught but the rough and tumble tactics of the outlands, was forgot. Blows were exchanged with a rapidity that must have been beyond the scoring of ring-side experts had there been any present. In the States, thousands pay their tens of dollars to see fights that were so little like this one as to seem primrose teas. There was nothing gentle about it. Not until Karmack sprawled his length on the rough

board floor was there the slightest breathing space, unless you'd call breathing the insucked breaths between clinched teeth that sounded more like exhausts from wheezy locomotives.

Seymour stepped back to give the factor time and space to rise if fight still was left in him. Great as was his provocation, he insisted on fighting fair. That there are no rules for rough-and-tumble made no difference to him. He couldn't hit a man who was down.

Karmack came up with a surprising show of strength, his eyes gleaming dangerously. One of these the sergeant closed with a body-wrecking jolt. In turn, he was knocked heavily against the counter. The sharp edge of this caught him across the small of the back, a terrific kidney blow. The surge of pain seemed to open the hinges of his knees.

At that vital moment, when he must have been hard put to keep his feet in any event, the factor fouled him with a vicious kick on the shin. It was inevitable that Seymour go down. In falling, though, he managed to lunge his body forward, gaining a clutching grip on his opponent's torso, and carrying him along.

There on the floor they rolled over and over like a couple of polar bears in deadly combat. First one and then the other was on top and in position to jab. Claret splotches marked their irregular course. Fingers tangled and untangled, now in the factor's black mop, then in the sergeant's brown one. The latter's uniform was tattered; the factor's tweeds were shredded. Punishment, however, was well distributed and the battle, so far, a draw.

But this winter, Karmack had held close to his store and spent long hours with his pipe; Seymour had roamed the open and seared his lungs with the vital air of the North. In the end, this difference which leather-pushers know as "wind condition" told its tale. The factor was rasping when the Mountie was still breathing with comparative ease. Longer and longer on each turn was the policeman holding the uppermost position.

Suddenly Karmack, underneath, ceased violent struggles. It seemed he had weakened.

"Had 'nough?" demanded Seymour. "Ready to tell the girl the truth?"

For answer, he felt the press of steel against his ribs. He realized in a flash that the factor had

drawn a gun from some handy concealment and that his seconds probably were numbered unless he rolled instantly out of range.

Roll he did just as the pistol growled.

The bullet grazed a button from his official tunic, then thudded into the plasterboard that covered the log wall. Next second, with a bone-breaking wrench, he twisted the weapon from the trickster's fingers. Scrambling to his feet, he threw down upon his opponent, meaning to cover him, just as the front door of the store was thrown open.

With the rush of icy air from without came a shrill feminine cry more startling than any previous happening of the contest.

"Don't shoot!" was the command that followed. "Don't you dare shoot, you uniformed brute!"

Seymour turned to see Moira glaring at him from behind an automatic pistol of her own, a blue-black little gun that was held as steady as a pointed finger. The sky-pilot up at Mission House was a pacifist, the sergeant knew. Doubtless he had told the girl the direction his anger had taken him.

"At last I believe," the girl went on, passion in

her voice, but not the slightest waver in her aim. "Well chosen was the name I gave you, Sergeant Scarlet!"

The stress she gave her nickname for him startled Seymour. "Just what do you mean, Moira?" he asked, keeping one eye upon the prone factor who seemed as startled by the intrusion as himself.

"That I've found the murderer of my brother and don't propose to see him claim another victim."

So that was what Harry Karmack had told the girl. That was why the light of her wondrous eyes had gone out for him. Any added hate of his enemy that might have grown from this was lost in her statement that she believed. To make certain that she considered him guilty, he put the direct question.

"After what I've just seen—on top of all that was pointed out to me—I'm forced to believe," she said brokenly. "Go, before I take a vengeance that is not mine to take, but the Law's. Go—go!"

As broken as the gun he flung at Karmack, Sergeant Seymour gathered up his sidearms from the counter and stalked out of the Arctic's store room.

CHAPTER XI

THE SCARLET SPECIAL

TEN days after the battle between the sergeant and the factor, the quiet of Armistice camp was again upset, this time most unexpectedly by the arrival of the "scarlet special." A corporal of the Royal Mounted breezed in by dog team over the frozen wastes from far-away Athabaska, the end of rail gateway of the North, where English to some extent gives place to Cree.

That he brought no mail—beyond a sealed order bag for Sergeant Seymour—showed that the special's visit was as sudden as a telegram. But he did carry a late newspaper or two and several magazines that gave week-by-week gists of the world's news since Armistice last had heard from "Outside," so his unexpected arrival was more than welcome to the whites in the camp.

To the disappointment of Corporal Gaspard Le Blanc, the short, plump but doughty French-Canadian who had made the remarkable trip, Sey-

mour was not at the post. The morning after the fight, a report had reached the detachment that a band of Eskimo on Skelly River were destitute. With Constable La Marr still convalescing from his accident, the sergeant had set out to investigate. His return was expected any hour of any day.

As the orders were sealed, the corporal to open them only when assured that something had happened to the ranking non-com to whom they were addressed, there seemed nothing to do but wait.

Factor Karmack was the first to call at headquarters. He met with a cold reception from La Marr, who naturally had sided with his superior on learning of the aspersion put upon the Force by the fur trader's insinuations in the O'Malley case.

"I hear there's a special in from outside," began the factor in his blandest manner. "Hope he had a good trip."

"Aye, not so bad," returned the constable, as communicative as a seal.

"By any chance, did he bring any mail for me?"

"Nothing but police business,—this special."

If Karmack was disturbed, he took pains not to show it.

"But surely he brought some newspapers. Might I borrow——"

"I'm sending a spare paper over to Mission House," was the chilly response. "You'd best go there for your news, Karmack."

The factor made as graceful an exit as any one could have asked, nodding pleasantly to the newly arrived corporal. Familiar with the usual fraternity of life in the land of bared boughs and grieving winds, the genial Gaspard expressed surprise.

"What the hell how is?" he asked. "You got something on that crow, *non*?"

"I don't like him," was all La Marr replied, not caring to bare his superior's heart troubles even to one of the Force.

The corporal, steeled against prying into personal affairs, asked no further questions. The two spent the day pleasantly by the open fire, which Avic—the prisoner under open arrest—kept replenished, it happening to be his week for headquarters fatigue duty.

At four in the afternoon, Sergeant Seymour munched in, tired and worn from his long errand of mercy. This he had solved by moving the im-

provident band to another camp of natives who were well supplied with food, the usual procedure in a country where it is impracticable to move relief supplies in mid-winter.

His first glance at the features of the corporal, who turned out to help him with the dogs, acted as a cocktail that banished all fatigue. A strange Mountie in quarters could mean only excitement of some sort and that was the most joyous tonic the sergeant knew.

Scarcely did he wait to peel off his trail clothes, so eager was he to break the seal of the dispatch bag. It held but a single sheet of orders—a dispatch from the commissioner himself dated at Ottawa more than five weeks before. With the two subordinates looking on in an interest that dared not be put into question form, he read and reread the message. The second scanning thereof snapped him to his feet.

“When did you arrive, corporal?” he asked.

“This morning—early.”

“Said nothing about what brought you, I hope?”

A smile flicked the ruddy Canadian face and the French shoulders shrugged. “How could I, when

I know not why they sent me on such a mush of the devil?"

"Karmack was here asking for mail—for the loan of papers," added La Marr. "I told him to go to Mission House for his news."

"Good enough," nodded the O. C. and started getting into the uniform which he wore when at the detachment. In his absence the tunic had been made fairly presentable, with few traces of his clash with the factor. "I'm going out for a prisoner," he said at the door. "You boys sit tight."

Straight across to the store of the Arctic Trading Company he stalked, but to meet with disappointment. Both the store and dwelling of Karmack were locked. Even the native interpreter was not to be roused. But the sergeant remembered what the constable had said about going to Mission House for newspapers. Doubtless, the factor was there, reading what had happened in the all-alive world since last report. It would not surprise him to find the four making a news feast out of the unexpected boon—reading aloud in turn every morsel

of type, even to the new advertisements. He quartered to the house of the Morrows.

"Safe home again, Seymour," Luke Morrow greeted him and dragged him hospitably into the living room. "It is well, but I wish you'd been a day sooner."

Seymour did not trouble to learn what the missionary meant by his concluding wish, but asked at once if Karmack was calling.

The missionary shook his head, his expression one of genuine surprise.

"Sort of expected to find him—reading papers brought in by special," explained Seymour. "La Marr said he had sent some over to you and told Karmack to come here for the news."

"Why—but—" Morrow was disturbed to a point of stammering distress. "The factor was here this morning, but he had news of his own. Didn't he leave the keys to the trading post with you police?"

Seymour in his turn, was aroused. "The keys! Why should he leave his keys with us?"

"He came here shortly before noon," explained the sky-pilot. "Said the scarlet special had brought him a summons to Ottawa that could not be denied.

He meant to ask you people to take charge until his relief arrived. His years of pioneer service in the North had been rewarded at last, he told us, and he was to be made a high official of the Arctic at the Ottawa headquarters. Naturally, we rejoiced with him."

"The nerve of the scamp!" exclaimed the sergeant. "The only word the special brought was a warrant for his arrest. He has been robbing the company for years and they've just found him out—got the proof. I came to arrest him. He must have surmised that the coming of the special meant only one thing and decided to make his get-away. And howling sun-dogs, this warrant I hold is a secret one! No general alarm has been sent out. Can I see Miss O'Malley—perhaps he's told her something of his plans? In the interests of justice, after she's seen the warrant, I'm sure she'll not protect him, much as she dislikes me."

The missionary seemed stunned. He bent over in his chair and cupped his hands over his eyes in an attitude of prayer.

"Good Lord, forgive us for our sins of omis-

sion," Seymour heard him murmur. "We are but mortal and the flesh of all mortals is weak. How were we to know——"

"Here, here!" interrupted the sergeant impatiently, although he had respect enough for prayer. "It's not your fault that Karmack got away or that you let him use Mission House in his courtship. You good folks couldn't have known he had done anything wrong. Send for Miss O'Malley at once. I've no time to lose."

Luke Morrow forgot his supplications for pardon and sprang to his feet. "No time to lose. You're right. That scoundrel was persuasive and we were weak. Karmack took Moira with him, offering her safe conduct to her friends and home in British Columbia. We'll never forgive ourselves for——"

But Sergeant Scarlet was gone in too great a hurry to close the door behind him.

CHAPTER XII

LIVING TARGETS

LIKE a Windigo boodie of the sub-Arctic on the trail of a craven Cree, Sergeant Seymour pushed through the white silence in pursuit of his fugitive. If the capture of Harry Karmack, embezzler, spurred him officially, the saving of Moira O'Malley from the fate that seemed in store for her lent wings to his snow-shoes. To himself he did not deny the fact that the personal interest was the most potent. There would be weeks and weeks, if required, to run down the dishonest trader. Didn't the Royal Mounted always get their man? But there were only hours, he sincerely believed, in which to spare the most beautiful feminine creature he had ever seen a lifetime of humiliation and grief.

This was no night for travel. All the rules of Northern trails forbade it. With the spirit thermometer down to sixty-five below, he should have been snugly in camp in some snow bank, wrapped

in rabbit-skin robes or encased in a sleeping bag, with his malamutes snuggled around him. The spirit within that enabled him to defy the inexorable grip of the frost was the same that had not permitted him to delay pursuit's start an hour.

Frankly, he would not have gone out that night after Karmack had the rascal been escaping alone. Considering the factor's passenger, however, nothing could have kept him at the Armistice detachment post.

There action had been swift once he had the fell news from Luke Morrow. At quarters, he had turned over the post to Corporal Le Blanc. He was to keep the Arctic company's trade-room and furs under seal; to do no trading except that which the welfare of visiting Indians and Eskimos demanded. Hardship might be worked if the trusting natives came in to exchange their furs for supplies and found no mart. The two Eskimo murderers were to remain under open arrest unless they displayed signs of wanderlust after his departure. La Marr was to take no chances with his injured leg, the corporal to make such patrols as were absolutely necessary. Thus, like a good commander, he prepared

for the all-too-many eventualities of winter travel.

Morrow had followed him to police quarters almost at once with an offer of the Mission House malamutes for the stern chase—stern in more than one sense of the word. Knowing that both the police teams were worn out—the one of the scarlet special and the other of mercy’s errand—Seymour had accepted the mission’s team, although he preferred always to drive his own dogs when they were in the least fit.

From Morrow, he had details of Karmack’s morning visit which had resulted in Moira’s unfortunate decision to attempt to go “Outside” under his escortage. Karmack had said he meant to take the shortest course to the Mackenzie on the frozen surface of which he expected to find a more or less traveled trail. He would be delighted to have Moira’s company. She could drive her own team and would find it easy to follow his own huskies. They would have the Arctic’s interpreter, a famous musher, to break trail and keep them on the right track. It would be an express trip, he had declared, and she would find herself with her friends before she knew it.

"Emma and I tried to dissuade her from taking the chance," the missionary had told Seymour with tears in his voice, "but the temptation was too much for the girl. We assured her she would be welcome to spend the rest of the winter, but she wanted to depart the scene of the tragedy."

At the moment, Seymour had wondered how much her ill-founded disappointment in him had affected her decision. And this thought kept recurring to him now as he followed the double sled trails. It clinched his determination to overtake them at the earliest possible moment.

Fortunately there was no wind to-night and he had nothing to contend against but the bitterness of the cold. He was traveling "light" with caribou pemmican, hardtack and tea as the major contents of his grub sack. The mission dogs were running as if out for an exercise jaunt; but the air was too frigid to permit much riding for their driver. Often he had to hold them back that he might not become absolutely winded.

Already he had proved one lie in Karmack's statement to the girl and the missionary, as reported with undoubted truthfulness by the latter.

The fugitive was not headed directly for the Mackenzie River, the natural highway "Outside." That would have taken him by the Wolf Lake trading and mission station. Even in the night, the sergeant recognized the ridge they were following and that there had been a sharp veering to the southwest. The course would bring them to the river far from any outpost and doubtless Karmack, if he got away, would continue to avoid all such on the way up river until certain he had out-distanced any pursuit.

The possibility that already the girl regretted her hasty decision to leave the Morricks occurred to him as a possible reason for Karmack's change of course. If she had threatened to give up the attempt upon reaching Wolf Lake, the factor, naturally, would give the other missionaries a wide berth. But cheering as was the idea, he soon dismissed it. Moira O'Malley was not the sort to turn back on an endeavor, and it was improbable that there had been any alarming overtures from Karmack so early in the wild project. He was clever, was Handsome Harry, and, by his own boast, experienced with women. He would wait

until he had completely won her by the countless services that would crop up on a trip of this sort.

All the more reason, then, for Seymour to overtake and capture before they got beyond reach of return to Armistice. Again and again his goad of caribou hide snapped near the ears of his team. The panting animals flattened their bodies while he rode the sled in defiance of the frost.

Soon after break of day, belated in this latitude and season, came his reward. In the course of the night's sled run he had worked out of the bare tundra country of the foreshore into a region splotted here and there with brush. Now he saw rising from one of the clumps ahead a spiral of smoke marking someone's breakfast fire.

No difficulty was there in guessing whose fire—not in the Great Barrens! Evidently, from the distance covered, Karmack had driven far into the night, but, none the less, did not mean to be deprived of an early start on the second day of his dash for freedom.

Seymour dragged the mission dogs to a halt a mile away from the fugitive's camp. When rival teams meet on the snows, they dash at each others'

throats with a chorus of yowls and all the strength of their respective masters is required to keep them apart. The sergeant expected to be engaged otherwise than clubbing malamutes when he got to that breakfast fire.

Accordingly, he untraced the team and chained them to the sled in such a way that any attempt to move that vehicle on the part of the animals leashed to one side would immediately meet with resistance of the dogs on the other side. Such an anchorage he had tried before and proved effective; in fact, it is about the only one possible in the open snow-fields.

Tossing each of the seven in the team a frozen fish, he removed his *parkee*, exposing to ready grasp the revolver at his hip. From its deer-hide case, he unlimbered his rifle as a precaution against being "potted" in case his approach was discovered at too great a distance for small-arm accuracy. Then he moved swiftly forward, the tails of his "webs" leaving a wake of flying snow.

Evidently, the three of the flight party were at breakfast, for he bore down on the temporary camp without alarm. Soon he was near enough to hear

the dogs of their two teams snarling over the morning meal. Noting that they were tethered between him and his objective, he circled for a safer approach.

Almost was he upon the camp when he saw Karmack departing in the direction of the dogs. Easily could he have picked off the accused embezzler with his rifle. But——

“Never fire first!”

With the real slogan of the Royal Mounted he admonished himself under his breath.

Nearer over the crunching snow he crept on that clumsy-looking but most effective footgear which man may have adopted from the snow-shoe rabbit. Now he could make out the front of a pup tent, doubtless thrown up for the protection of the beauty of the party. Koplock, the Arctic's interpreter, could be seen packing utensils for the start. The girl was not in sight.

Two minutes more would have brought him into camp and everyone under cover of his rifle. Then, from out of the tent, came Moira, facing him!

He heard her cry out; could not determine whether from surprise at the unexpected appear-

ance of a human stalking out of the white solitude or as a warning to her companions.

Of these, Karmack whirled at first alarm, but the native did not look up from his task. Evidently the factor recognized the unwelcome visitor, for he started back with a rush, drawing his automatic as he ran.

"Never fire first!" the voice of training whispered as the sergeant hurled himself toward his foe.

Karmack's pistol barked. A bullet whizzed past the policeman's ear, a narrow miss but as good as a mile.

Now came the King's turn. Upward to his shoulder swung the gun with which Seymour had won many a target match. In a second, it seemed, Karmack must bite the snow.

But the gun never was fired. Into direct range between the two men, Moira O'Malley had flung herself, a tall, fur-clad figure. The human target of the scoundrel momentarily was blanketed. What mattered it that the school girl of Ottawa was pointing an automatic as steadily as she had held it upon him in the trade room that time back in

Armistice. Sergeant Scarlet could not fire upon an innocent woman.

He barely saw a whiff of smoke leave the mouth of her pistol, scarcely heard what seemed a double report, when a burning sensation along one temple and across the side of his scalp threw him backward to a fall on his side.

And as he toppled into the snow, to lie inert and helpless, it seemed to him that the glorious girl lunged forward to the same cold couch that was his.

Was it possible that, by some involuntary pressure on the trigger, he had fired at Moira O'Malley? In the paralytic clutch of the moment he could not answer the heart-burning question.

Consciousness must have fled Seymour's mind for just a moment. With its return, he realized that Karmack was shouting excited orders to Koplack, the interpreter. Haunted by that last glimpse of Moira tumbling forward into the snow, the sergeant tried to raise himself for another look over the tragic stage. Only his brain seemed awake; body muscles refused to respond to its demand. He could only lie there, staring into the dingy, low-hung sky, and listen.

"Very bad affair this one, boss," he heard.

The voice was Koplock's and the conversational tone, which carried through the frosty stillness plainly, indicated that the interpreter and the factor stood together.

"The red-coat killed her firing at me, you can see that and swear to it, can't you?" Karmack demanded.

"But no, Meestair Karmack," came from the native. "She is hit from the back. It was your bullet that lay her low. Koplock swear to nothing but the truth."

An imprecation sprang from the factor's lips, but scarcely registered with the listening sergeant. He was too filled with rejoicing that no involuntary shot of his had struck her down.

"It don't matter," he heard Karmack grumble. "Go have a look at the policeman. If only she killed him——"

Seymour heard the crunch of snow-shoes; knew that the native was coming toward him. What should he do? He was convinced that his wound was only a "crease"; hoped that the muscular

numbness would pass. To feign death under the native's inspection was his first impulse.

But to that plan, several objections immediately presented themselves. The mission-schooled Eskimo would be hard to deceive with no more convincing evidence than a bullet graze. Again, there was no telling how long the paralysis that gripped him would continue. No one could lay out in today's temperature for any length of time without freezing.

He recalled that Koplock had always shown a dog-like devotion to him; undoubtedly was grateful for the fees which Seymour had paid for his services as interpreter for the government. Certainly the native was greatly disturbed by what had just happened. To throw himself on the Eskimo's mercy held some risk but more chance of ultimate safety than attempting to play 'possum.

In the moment of the bronze man's crossing, the sergeant had argued this out and come to a decision.

His eyes were closed when Koplock stood over him and touched his body with the toe of his muck-luck. The native stooped for a close examination

of the head wound. Seymour's eyes opened, his lips moved in a whisper.

"Stand by your king," he said. "Tell Karmack I'm dead, but don't go on with him."

Koplock assented with a wink and quickly straightened.

"Him passed out," Seymour heard him call to his employer. "Center shot."

"Not so bad," came the unfeeling response from the factor. "That's what he gets for edging into my affairs. Come here, you."

The sergeant heard the native shoeing back and then came the calloused instructions of a hard-pressed fugitive who could not afford to lose his head in such an emergency.

"I must mush on with my dogs," said Karmack. "Take the girl back to Armistice on her sled. Tell them—oh, make up any story you like; you'll do that anyhow. I'll be where they'll never get me."

"What do with him?" Koplock asked, pointing toward Seymour.

"The cop—let the wolves bury him."

Five minutes or so after Karmack's "Mush—

mush on!" had signalled his continuation of flight, Koplock again was at the side of the sergeant.

"Him very bad mans, that Factor Karmack," he said as he began a vigorous massage of Seymour's limbs. For a moment he worked vigorously to restore circulation and the officer was able to reward him by twitching his fingers.

"Big joke, this on Karmack," went on the native, chuckling gutturally.

"Where's the joke with Miss O'Malley dead?" Seymour demanded, as the Eskimo turned him over to knead his spine. Koplock was too much engaged in his operations to reply readily, then:

"The most big joke him is Miss O'Malley she am not dead but just some hurt like you."

The effect upon Seymour was magical. Power returned to his muscles as suddenly as it had departed from them. Of his own will, he turned over and sat up in the snow. With the Eskimo's aid, he got to his feet. He glanced anxiously over the battle scene, but could see nothing of the beloved figure. His eyes put the question.

"Koplock carry her to tent," answered the native.

"Good boy, Koplock!"

Slowly, for his legs were numb, and with the native's grip to steady him, Seymour walked to the tent. There the girl lay wrapped in a rabbit-skin robe, gazing open-eyed at the roof, upon her flushed face an expression of surprise, as if she did not understand just what had befallen her.

"Thank heaven you're alive!" cried the Mountie, staring down at her, his eyes brimming with tears of rejoicing.

"You—you!" she murmured. "Where is Mr. Karmack?" She seemed afraid and her wide eyes accused him cruelly.

Seymour sat down beside her. "After nearly murdering you, *Mister* Karmack has continued his flight," he said. "You and I will thrash this out once and for all, Moira. The wound of his shot in your back will have to wait until I've cleared your mind of certain apprehensions."

She turned from him, but he felt certain that she would listen. First he assured her of his great liking for her brother, a mutual regard, he believed. Then he recounted every pertinent detail of the brutal strangling with the Ugiuk-line, not forgetting the evidence of the two too-well-curried

fox pelts. Frankly, he set forth Karmack's jealous motive in casting her suspicions upon himself. Her own misinterpretation of the scene she had interrupted in the trade room was contended with a convincing account of the entire struggle, ending with Karmack's attempt to shoot him. To prove the factor's real reason for flight, he read her the warrant which the "scarlet special" had brought from Ottawa.

"And to-day," he concluded, "while trying again to kill me, he shot you instead."

Slowly the girl turned her averted gaze. With a glad throbbing of heart, he saw she was convinced.

"And I believed—a thief," she mourned. "I started for the provinces with him that I might the sooner have the law on you. My heart told me—why, why didn't I listen—that it could not be you. Oh, Sergeant Scarlet, can you ever forgive me?"

"Forgiven already—and forgotten, all but Karmack's devilish part," he assured her.

Now, for the first time, the girl noticed the gash across his scalp. "But you—you're wounded. How—who?—"

"It's just a scratch," said he cheerfully. "Knocked me out for a bit, you know, but all right now. The how and who don't matter. Suppose we see how slightly you're hurt?"

Koplock stood in the tent door with a pan of boiling water, heated at Seymour's orders. The sergeant took this from him and sent him to bring in the police team. Then, with deft fingers, he set about an examination of what proved to be a shoulder wound.

To his great relief, he found that the bullet had gone entirely through, leaving a clean bore through the muscles, with no need for probing. The girl's coma, so like death as to deceive the excited factor, evidently had been from shock. Applying a first-aid dressing, he bundled the injured shoulder against the cold.

Koplock, with fingers none too gentle, looked after Seymour's own injury and bandaged it with material from the police emergency kit. Then they gathered brush from the thicket and built a rousing fire before the tent.

That they would make no attempt to move that day was Seymour's first decision. The girl, he felt,

needed rest after the shock of her wounding more than immediate attention from one with more surgical experience than he possessed. Whether to take her back to Armistice or across country to Wolf Lake required more consideration. The fact that there was a missionary surgeon at the lake who had more skill than Luke Morrow finally decided him. Moreover, by going to the trading post, he would be much nearer the frozen highway of the Mackenzie over which his pursuit of Karmack must continue.

In the afternoon, as they lounged in the tent with the genial warmth of the brush fire playing upon them, Seymour broached one of the mysteries of the eventful winter.

"Mind telling me, Moira, what brought you on this wild, unseasonable dash into the North?" he asked her.

"It was fear, Sergeant Scarlet—fear for my brother."

He was surprised. "You mean that you had a premonition that something was going to happen to him?"

"Not that exactly," the girl amplified her first

response. "There was a motion picture I chanced to see in Ottawa. It was a dreadful thing called 'The Perils of the North' or something like that. The young man in the picture, away from all of his own kind—well, you know what might happen. He became a—a squaw man. I got to thinking of Oliver. He had dashed off while I was on a visit in Montreal and hadn't even said good-bye. There was nothing really to keep me in the cities and I decided my place was with him. That was why I came and not in time——" she broke off with a sob.

Sergeant Seymour assured her that her apprehensions of her brother becoming a squaw-man were absolutely unfounded. A cleaner specimen of young Canadian, he declared, had never fared to the Arctic foreshore. But he did not tell her, then, the real reason behind Oliver O'Malley's ill-starred venture.

CHAPTER XIII

HIS MONTREAL PROMISE

THE scene in the rotunda of Montreal's impressive Windsor Station was as lively as it was metropolitan. Trains arrived with their outpourings of passengers, baggage laden, rejoicing at journey's end in the Paris of Canada. Immigrants, queerly dressed, stood about in huddled groups, waiting to be herded into the cars that would carry them to the wheat lands of Saskatchewan or the green forests of British Columbia. "Red caps" hustled about with the expensive looking luggage of tourists bound back to their own United States with their thirsts, for once, thoroughly quenched *sans* any violation of law.

At one gate to the train shed, an explosive Frenchman bade a tearful farewell to a brother ticketed for Winnipeg. At another, behind a brass guard rail, a tall, upstanding citizen waited with impatience the coming of the Ottawa express. His fur coat was unbuttoned and an open-faced suit

of evening clothes showed beneath. In fact, even his oldest friends in the far North might have passed him by without recognizing Staff Sergeant Russell Seymour, on special detail.

The hunt for Harry Karmack, embezzler of the funds of the Arctic Trading Company, Ltd., of course, had not been given up. This was Seymour's "special"—and would be until the fugitive was apprehended, as is the way of the Royal Mounted. Even a report brought to Fort McMurray by a wandering Chipewyan that the factor's body had been found frozen at the foot of Ptarmigan Bluffs had not halted the search an hour. The Indian's story was too "pat"; the last lost-in-blizzard note signed "Karmack" too obvious a plant.

A blizzard there had been, to be sure, a stem-winder. Just in time to escape the white scourge howling South, Seymour had mushed into Wolf Creek Station with his precious invalid. But he could not believe that the Armistice factor had permitted himself to be caught in the storm. Too long had Karmack been in the North to meet any such tenderfoot fate. An old trick, that of reporting

one's self dead by freezing. The thief might have saved himself the expense of hiring the Indian to bring in the "death notice," for all it was believed.

This blizzard had held Seymour at Wolf for three endless weeks. There had been just one recompense. At the end of that period the mission surgeon had pronounced Moira sufficiently recovered to continue her trip by dog team. The weather had favored them and eventually they had found themselves in Athabaska, end-of-steel! The trains of the Canadian National and the Grand Trunk Pacific had carried them to Ottawa, the girl to a welcome in the home of friends, the sergeant to report at headquarters.

After a conference with the commissioner, Seymour had stepped out of uniform and into plain clothes. The still-hunt then begun had continued for three months, leading first to Quebec whence Karmack had originally hailed. There the sergeant had obtained information which confirmed his disbelief of the lost-in-blizzard note. Karmack had paid a stealthy visit to his old home and departed. Rumor had it that he had gone to the States. Therefore, Seymour did not cross the border to look for

him. Knowing the man and his inclinations, the sergeant's hunch was Montreal. From a rented room on City Councillor Street, midway between the French and Up-town quarters of the city, he had played his hunch industriously, but so far without result. He had kept away from the mounted police headquarters on Sherbrooke West and not once had he been taken for what he was, even by fellow members of the Force.

He was growing tired of the city's confinement, but not discouraged. One day he would meet his man, know him no matter what his disguise.

This was to be a night off, the first he had taken since getting back to civilization. It was to be a gala, reunion night; and it was beginning, for the Ottawa express had just ground to a stop in the shed outside the high iron grill.

His pulse beat quicker as he scanned the in-comers—first the smoking-car compliment, then the day-coach passengers and, at last the Pullman elect. Then he saw her, coming with the poise of a queen, a small black bag in her hand. Neatly he hurdled the brass barrier and at the very gate he took her into his arms and kissed her.

"Moir, Moira! You're a glad sight for tired eyes," he murmured.

"But not here, Sergeant Scarlet; not here with the world looking on," she whispered in pretended protest.

He did not care how much of the world saw, for between them an understanding for life had been reached on the trail.

A taxi, its wheels wearing chains with which to grip the snowy streets, hustled them to the Mount Royal Hotel, where he had reserved a room for her. In less time than most men would have believed possible, she had rejoined him in the lobby, a vision fit to snow-blind the gods, gowned in shimmering silver with a black fringe setting it off.

Evenings with Moira were too precious to leave anything to chance and Seymour's program had been carefully prearranged. Again they took a taxi and the taxi took them out St. Catherine Street to a brilliant electric fairyland—the Venetian Gardens. What mattered it that snow never lies in the streets of Venice? Well might they have

been in sunny Italy once they had climbed a flight of stairs to pleasure's rendezvous above.

As they entered the huge dancing room, the lights went low and the orchestra that doesn't "jazz" began the soft measures of a waltz. They did not wait to find their table, but swung away with the music—for their first dance together.

And when they were seated, she asked across the narrow board: "Do they teach dancing, as well as riding and straight-shooting, at the Regina depot, Sergeant Scarlet?"

"You're forgetting, you big beau'ful Irisher, that I've been to France since I left the Mounted's riding academy."

After they had danced again: "It's hard to wait, Russell. Sometimes I wonder if it's worth while. Will you ever get your man?"

On the frozen trail, after he had spoken the three magic words and she had returned them to him with equal fervor, they had agreed that marriage was not to be thought of until Harry Karmack had been brought to book.

It was a long moment before he answered.

"I've got to get him, Moira. There'd not be

complete happiness for us with that business unfinished. You wouldn't want to change a fine old County Mayo name like O'Malley for that of a quitter would you, now? But know this, girl o' mine——"

He did not finish, his interest claimed by a large red-headed man, a bit the worse for liquor. This chap's attention had been attracted by a pair of police constables, resplendent in their brilliant uniforms, handsome young fellows attached to the Montreal detachment, which has a reputation for "swank."

"Take those young Mounties a bottle of wine and mark it down on my check," the rubric one was saying to the waiter.

The woman with him, a pretty French girl, reached across the table in an effort to quiet him.

"You leave me alone, Florette," he resented. "I got most all the money in the world and those brave lads work for next to nothing a year."

"Next to nothing a year." Seymour repeated the expression under his breath. Where had he heard that expression before as applied to the same Force which yonder cubs decorated? In a flash he was

transported back to the trade-room of a sub-Arctic factor.

“But know this, girl of mine,” Seymour repeated. “Get him I will.”

CHAPTER XIV

A DOUBLE-BARRELLED CASE

SERGEANT Russell Seymour of the Royal Canadian again was mounted—actually astride a horse with spur at heel and a fine feel of leather between his knees. The best part of the continent separated him from the Montreal fairyland and the regal beauty in whom his ambition and hope lay centered.

An exigency of the service—the policing of the mushroom gold camp which he was approaching—had been responsible for the sudden shift of action's scene. Not that the hunt for the Armistice embezzler had been forgot or abandoned, but with the idea that a cold trail might warm if left alone for a while, its crossing effected when least expected.

The problem at Gold, British Columbia, was so large a one that the authorities had overlooked no advantage. The fact that Seymour had never seen service in the province presented the attractive pos-

sibility of his making a preliminary survey in plain clothes, severely plain, in truth—as plain as stained khaki, scuffed leather and battered felt could materialize.

The fact that the region was that selected by Moira's father for his missionary activities and that she proposed soon to join the parent did not make the summer prospect less attractive for the big policeman. The lovely creature riding beside him, however, was not the Irish girl but another he had overtaken entirely by chance.

“Of course,” he was saying to her, “it wouldn't be a worth-while gold rush if there wasn't plenty of crowds and excitement. Do you think I'm in time?”

“Oh, there's still a chance for you to locate a pay claim—if luck's riding with you,” she said cheerfully. “Scarcely a day passes without someone reporting a new ‘discovery.’ But you're just three days too late for our first real excitement. One of the B. C. X. stages was held up and robbed last Monday.”

Almost did the sergeant give himself away at this

crime report. In more ways than his fair informant could possibly imagine, he felt too late.

At a recent conference in Hazelton, a railroad town on the Grand Trunk Pacific, Assistant Commissioner Baxter, in command of the division in which the new diggings lay, had decided that the sergeant should remain incognito until he had had opportunity to study the field of his new important command. In the rôle of one of the gold-crazed "rushers" the news of the camp would float unrestrained in his presence. He should be able to get an advance line on those who were prone to lawlessness, as well as identify the element which might be counted on the side of law and order. Moreover, he could form an unbiased opinion as to the prospective permanency of the camp and the number of constables needed to police it satisfactorily.

He had shipped a "war bag" containing his uniforms and personal effects by the stage line of this same British Columbia Express which the girl had just mentioned. The charges were prepaid and the baggage was to be held until called for. Then he had set out on a rangy police horse, Kaw, over the Old Sun Trail, a time-blazed path into the Yukon

country, from which a cross-cut had let him into Argonaut Valley.

"Did the robbers get—make their escape?" he asked, remembering in time to cut the professional tone from his question.

"Clean as a whistle. They killed the driver at the reins so there isn't a clew even to what they looked like or how many there were."

"But the passengers?" he ventured to ask.

The girl shrugged shapely shoulders. The face that looked from beneath the shielding brim was framed in ash-blond wavelets. The figure that had looked so boyish from a distance, while he was overtaking her, was now rounded into exquisite feminine lines. Her corduroy riding trousers were frankly worn without hint of a skirt, but her gray flannel shirt was V'd at the neck to show a marble throat such as no boy could have endured. And in the belt that pouched a man-weight automatic was the final touch—a small bouquet of waxen snow-flowers.

In answer to his question she told him that there were no passengers in the coach. "It was the in-

bound baggage wagon they held up, you see—doubtless by mistake.”

As he pondered the unusual circumstance of road agents mistaking a baggage wagon for a passenger-carrying coach, they were startled by gun fire. Seymour’s expert ears placed it a short distance ahead and to the right of them—a bit nearer town. He recognized the snarl of a rifle and, a moment later, the bark of a pistol. Unquestionably, the reports had come from different weapons.

A half-stifled scream drew his attention to the girl at his side. The effect on her was surprising. She could not have showed greater alarm if one of the bullets had perforated her hat. Every trace of color had fled her cheeks.

“Oh, that it’s just some hunter and not——”

If she finished her prayerful expression, Seymour did not hear it, for she had dug heels into her horse and the animal was skimming the trail.

Kaw took after the cayuse full tilt; his rider, the while, listening for other shots, but heard none. Ahead, he saw the girl round a sharp turn into what seemed to be a through road into town. If she was

seeking the source of the shots they had heard, he knew she need not go far.

When his black negotiated the turn and the road was spread out before him, he saw that she had arrived. Her horse stood nosing another and she was kneeling in the trail beside an indistinct figure. In a moment he had dismounted and stood beside her.

"Too late," she cried, looking up at him with a terrified expression. "If only I hadn't slowed to chat with you—I feared they would get him and was riding to warn him. I thought there was plenty of time to get to town before he started."

She did not blame him for the delay; seemed only to accuse herself. For the sergeant, there was enough of surprise in the figure of the slain man to occupy his mind and eyes.

"Who—who is he?" he asked after staring a moment.

"He's our new mounted police officer, Sergeant Russell Seymour," she said, her voice hushed. "Don't you know the uniform when you see it?"

Seymour did recognize that particular uniform far better than she possibly could have imagined, but he refrained from admitting it.

Reaching down, the sergeant raised the girl to her feet; but he did not set her right on the mistake in identity. The case looked double-barrelled to him inasmuch as it gave him an inside line on the holdup of the express company's stage and a lead toward at least one element of the heterogeneous camp which was opposed to the coming of the Dominion's law-bringers. He meant to handle both angles with the utmost effect and the fact that they existed must for a time remain his secret.

"Looks like murder," he said, his eyes leaving the stolen uniform and focusing on the wound, the clean hole of a steel bullet in the right temple.

"It is murder—from ambush," the girl declared, her voice sharp with conviction.

But Seymour was not so sure. Without disturbing a convulsive death grip, he examined the revolver held in an outflung hand. It had been discharged once.

"'Twasn't a complete ambush, anyway," he reasoned. "He had some hint of what was coming. Couldn't have drawn his gun after that bullet hit him. The way my ears read the reports, he fired just after the rifle spoke—probably a spas-

modic pull on the trigger with no aim or hit. You know, Mounties are not supposed to fire first. The rule has killed a number of them."

"He was so brave—absolutely fearless," she murmured.

Seymour might have gone further in reconstructing the crime, but he checked observation on the subject lest she suspect his training.

"You knew him well, Miss——Miss——" he asked, partially to divert her mind from his professional deductions.

"I'm Ruth Duperow," she told him. "My uncle is a missionary here."

At once he remembered Moira's description of the colorful cousin who was keeping her father company. The contrast in type was remarkable.

"Yes," she went on, "I knew the sergeant quite well and admired—both my uncle and I admired his courage and uprightness."

"You said his name was——"

The girl's frankness did not desert her. "His real name was Russell Seymour but we knew him first as Bart Caswell. You see, he has been here for a month, studying the camp without anyone sus-

pecting that he was not the mining expert he pretended he was. Not until the stage robbery did he disclose who he was and put on his uniform."

Seymour turned to hide a smile; the plan which the girl outlined as Bart Caswell's sounded so exactly like his own. When he turned back to her, his hand was stroking meditatively a clean shaven chin.

"Is there a coroner in Gold?" he asked.

"When a man was killed in a shaft cave-in on Sweet Marie Creek last week, a deputy acted before uncle read the service," was the girl's information, delivered with a frown. The reason for the contraction of brow appeared when she added "That deputy sheriff and coroner is a chump named Sam Hardley, and he didn't like Bart—I mean Mr. Seymour."

The real Seymour made mental note of this fragment without seeming to be impressed or more than casually interested.

"At that, Hardley will have to be notified, I suppose," Miss Duperow went on. "It's the law, isn't it?"

The sergeant nodded. "Something of the sort.

But first I'm going to have a little look into the brush to see—what I can see. Mind waiting for a few minutes?"

"Don't risk it," cried the girl, taking a step toward him and laying an impulsive hand upon his sleeve. "Whoever murdered Bart may be lurking in the brush and wouldn't hesitate to take a shot at you. You don't know how desperate the——" She broke off in sudden caution and finished inconsequentially: "One killing is enough for to-day."

"A killing too many," he assured her, but swung into the saddle. "I'll take no unnecessary chances, and I'll not be gone long."

With the girl's disapproving look following him, he rode into the underbrush to the left of the trail. From that direction, he figured, had come the bullet. He had small hope of any encounter. With the cowardly attack neatly turned, he could conceive no reason why the perpetrator should hide around the scene of the crime. There was a chance, however, that he might pick up the trail of departure and learn its trend before the camp's amateur sleuths got busy and blotted out all signs.

On superficial survey, it seemed to the sergeant

that the bogus officer had been riding out from town on some mission not entirely unsuspected by those against whom he meant to act. Near the trail forks, someone had lain in wait and killed him.

One shot had sufficed. Caswell's effort to answer undoubtedly had been futile. Then the slayer had slunk away in the brush. It seemed unlikely that he would go into town; entirely reasonable that he would return whence he had come. Seymour imagined that that would be the place for which the pretended Mountie was bound, were that ever determined. That the escape had been through the brush seemed likely, since nobody had passed them on the trail after the shooting.

Twenty yards into the brush, he set Kaw parallel with the trail that followed the River Cheena. The undergrowth was not too thick for riding if one watched for fallen trees and devil-club thickets. The ground, soft from recent spring rains, took tracks like putty. An Indian in moccasins might have passed without leaving a trail, but any booted white must have shed footprints like Crusoe's man Friday.

Soon, the officer picked up horse tracks so fresh

as to be still sucking moisture from the muskeg. These angled toward the trail over which he had followed Miss Duperow. He traced them back to a clump of poplars. There he found evidence that a horse had been tied, evidently having been ridden from the main trail.

Footprints coming and going testified to a round trip in that direction. He examined these with care. In measuring these with a lead pencil, for lack of a tape, he noted the impress of a peculiar plate on the side of the right sole. Either the wearer was slightly lame or possessed a gait that made it advisable to reinforce the outer edge of his boot.

The foot trail ended in a patch of salmonberry bushes, already in thick leaf and furnishing an ideal curtain. Groping about where the earth was beaten down, he soon discovered a copper cartridge case. His eyes sized this as having been thrown from a 30-30 Winchester, the same sort as that his saddle carried, one likely to be common in that region. Undoubtedly the dented case had held the steel nosed bullet that had ended the career of the crook who had dared impersonate a Mountie.

When Seymour stood erect, he saw he was head

and shoulders above the bramble screen, in plain view and easy range of the tragedy scene. Doubtless in the very spot which he occupied, the murderer had stood erect to fling a taunt or shout a false warning at the approaching horseman; then he had shot before the other could act.

The circumstances of the crime reproduced to his own satisfaction, Seymour squandered a moment in studying his partner of the trail, his scrutiny unsuspected by the fair object thereof.

Ruth Duperow stood uncovered, her hat hanging from the horn of her saddle. The sun played upon the unmeshed waves of her silver-gold hair, bringing out unnumbered glints. She was taller than he had thought, almost as tall as her cousin, Moira. Her face was buried in hands that rested on the saddle seat, her poise slumped and heavy with grief.

"Poor youngling," mused the sergeant in deep sympathy. "She's taking it hard. These gentlemen crooks sure raise Ned with the ladies. Knowing that her uncle was a missionary, this Bart would not be at loss what trumps to lead. Reckon his blossoming out in my scarlet just topped the bill.

Must have cut quite a figure in life, this Bart Caswell—or whatever his real name was. Handsome dog, too. No resemblance to me.” He turned away with the hope that someone else would have the job of telling her the murdered man himself was a criminal.

Regaining his horse, Seymour mounted, minded to follow the hoof-print trail for a way. This was child’s play; Kaw attended to it, leaving the sergeant free to peer ahead. Meantime, his mind was busy revolving the surprising facts with which chance had equipped him.

He saw no need for mental doubt over the stage robbery. The uniform in which Bart was clad unquestionably was the dressier of the two he had enclosed in the bag and shipped to Gold. The “E” Division had a new tailor, a mistake had been made in stitching on the insignia and trace of the change remained on the sleeve. Even had there been other members of the Force in the district, he would have sworn to that uniform. He had not a doubt that the handsome deceiver of Cousin Ruth either had held up the stage single handed or had participated in the crime.

He could not agree with Ruth Duperow that the road agent, or agents, had mistaken the express vehicle for one of the passenger coaches in use on this difficult line. That did not stand the test of reason, any more than did a supposition that the robbery had been for the sake of obtaining the uniform of a mounted police officer. No one possibly could have known that such a rig was in transit. At best, the authority which any spurious wearer might command, must be of brief duration for the owner could be counted on to follow his clothes. The risk was not worth the fleeting advantage.

The sergeant did not have to argue himself into a conviction that he must seek elsewhere for the purpose of the holdup. Some other shipment—just what, he meant to find out—that was coveted and worth taking chances to secure must have been expected. He believed that, in examining his loot, the robber-murderer had come upon the uniform and had decided to use it in some other bold stroke without the law.

The sergeant could not withhold admiration for the daring which the man who called himself Caswell had shown in his last hours of life. To put

on the trusted and feared uniform, to declare himself the representative of Dominion authority and to undertake the solution of his own crime was a coup as clever and novel as it was impudent. Had the culprit stopped there, he might have made a clean get-away with whatever else of loot the stage carried. Seymour concluded that the prize which had made him resort to murder must be of great value. He did not overlook the possibility that Bart might have been slain by a pal dissatisfied with the division of the spoils. But, in view of hints dropped by Ruth, he was inclined to believe that this morning's slaying had no connection with the B. C. X. crime. The girl, after all, was his best source of information.

Just as he was about to turn back and question her further, the horse tracks he was following broke from the bush into the switchback trail and were lost. At once he swung Kaw around for the return canter. Shortly he overtook his own pack cayuse faithfully plodding in pursuit, and took the animal under halter, that it might not become confused at the crossroads.

At the turn, he saw that a group of men had

gathered about the lifeless figure of Bart. A freight wagon drawn by three yoke of oxen had been stopped near by and reins dropped on four or five saddle horses. But he looked in vain for his companion of chance. Ruth Duperow and her mount were gone.

CHAPTER XV

UNDER SUSPICION

NONE of the usual greetings of the Northern trail were offered Seymour as he rode up to the group. Instead, he found himself the target for a battery of frowning glances. The men presented a stolid front of frigid scrutiny. The probability flashed upon him that, as the first stranger to reach the scene, he was under suspicion in connection with the crime.

The sergeant stopped his horse and was about to dismount when there was a movement among the men. A short, stout man, from whose ample belt dangled a small cannon of a revolver, waddled forth to stand before him.

"What's happened?" asked Seymour quickly deciding to say nothing of his previous visit.

"That's what we're goin' to find out," said the fat man in that shrill small voice with which humans of undue girth often are afflicted. "Who're you?"

This question was as natural as Seymour's own, but the manner in which it was asked put him on edge. And since Bart had appropriated his name along with his uniform, he could not answer truthfully without laying himself open to a further explanation than he proposed to make at that moment.

"As for that, who're you?" he snapped back.

"I'm Deputy Coroner Samuel Hardley." The speech was pompous; so was his turning back of a coat lapel to exhibit a nickle-plated badge of office. "I'm also deputy sheriff and represent the law of British Columbia in Gold."

Seymour had suspected his interrogator's identity; was ready with his "Glad to meet you, chief."

"And I've got authority to make you answer my questions," piped the deputy. "Where you from and what's your business?"

"From the Caribou country by way of the Old Sun trail," Seymour answered truthfully enough. "There's my outfit." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder toward the pack horse which stood with prospector's equipment in broadside view. "That tells you what my business is."

“Be ready to prove it. What you know about this murder?”

The sergeant wished he knew just how the Dupe-row girl stood in this matter. Probably, for reasons of her own, she had gone on before any of the town party had arrived—possibly because she had heard them coming. If any of them had seen her, it seemed evident that she had not mentioned his participation in the discovery, or that he was beating the bush on the case. Yet, after all her seeming frankness and her keen personal interest in the victim, why had she “slid out.” Since he could not answer that mental query, he decided on reticence in answering the deputy’s spoken one.

“I don’t know anything about it,” he replied with no appreciable delay, although without accenting the “know,” as he should have done in strict truth.

“Queer you should come ambling along with Seymour of the Royal Mounted lying in the road not yet cold,” grumbled Hardley. “Yes sir-ee; it looks right queer to me. I think I’d better take you in on suspicion.”

Seymour bore down on him with a most direct glance, the blue of his eyes almost black in their intensity—black as the ears of Kaw between which he was forced to look for exact focus. “And I think you’d better do nothing of the sort—on suspicion. I’m a Canadian citizen; I have and know my rights.”

The sergeant, of course, was running a sheer bluff. The provincial officer might have placed him under arrest; but to suffer detention was not in Seymour’s program, for relief from it probably would require the disclosing of his identity at a time when he felt he could work more to advantage under cover. In the brief moment of their roadside controversy, he had “sized” his man and believed him one who would yield to a stronger will without other than ocular demonstration.

But he did not have time to prove his estimate of Hardley. Aid, or interference—whichever way one looked at it—came from an unexpected quarter.

“The stranger’s right, Sam,” spoke a handsome, blond-haired chap whose look of intelligence

recommended him to Seymour as above average. "You haven't any call to arrest him just because he happened along a public trail at an unlucky moment. Far as that goes, you might better arrest yourself."

"What you driving at, Phil Brewster?" demanded Hardley, breaking away from the stranger's gaze and turning on his fellow townsman. "Are you hinting that I had any hand in sending 'West' one of his majesty's officers?"

"You was jealous of him," put in an old man with a twisted face; the driver of the oxen, if one could judge from the goad upon which he leaned.

"And sore as a pup when you found he had been here a month without your suspicioning," contributed another townsman.

Evidently Hardley was not surrounded by any picked possé and was none too much respected as the peace officer of the community.

Relieved to be out of the calcium, at least for the moment, Seymour swung from his horse and crossed the road to look at the body of Bart, the natural move had he really been stranger to the tragedy.

The deputy chose to ignore the jibes of his neighbors. But he renewed his demands upon Brewster for an interpretation of his insinuations, reminding him he was no "bohunk freighter" to be talked to as an ox.

"Oh, I don't think for a minute that you kicked off the staff sergeant," the handsome chap began to explain. To the real Seymour, listening, came a creepy feeling at the use of his name in such a connection. "I was just using you as an example to show your hasty methods with this stranger," Brewster went on. "You were sitting in your saddle and staring down at the remains when I rode up from the creeks. But I didn't suspect you of firing the shot or even of knowing anything about it."

Hardley looked somewhat mollified.

"But Sam was jealous," persisted the ox-driver.

"Stop your noise, Cato!" shrilled the deputy. "There was a perfectly good reason for my being first on the scene. I saw the sergeant ride past my shack all uniformed-up and looking as if he meant business!"

"More'n you'd know how to look," goaded Cato,

playfully prodding the deputy with one of his inordinately long arms.

“Want me to bash you up?” Hardley demanded, irritated; then went on with his explanation. “For reasons best known to himself and beyond my ken, now never to be disclosed to mortal understanding, Seymour hadn’t been taking me into his confidence either before or after uncovering himself. It wasn’t good policemenmanship on his part, I’ll say, but I’m big enough of a man——”

Cato’s crackling laughter interrupted. “Big enough, I’ll say—but of a *man*?” he burst out.

“Anyway, I figgered I knew the breed of wolves up the creek better than he did and that he might need help. You know Sam Hardley’s gun is always ready. So I saddled up old Loafer there and took out after him, prepared to lend a hand to law and order as was my sworn duty.”

There was further exchange among the Goldites—theories regarding the new crime, gratuitous advice for the fat deputy, speculation regarding its effect on the outside reputation of the camp. Glad that interest had shifted from himself, Seymour listened subconsciously.

Suddenly his attention was claimed by a decoration which had not been on the uniform when he had at first scrutinized it. Into the breast opening of the serge coat was tucked a spray of snow flowers.

"Her last tribute," his thoughts whispered. "And an ill-considered one if she has any reason for not wanting her little world to know that she first discovered the crime."

It was unlikely that the imposter had been anywhere that morning where he could pluck flowers which Seymour knew to grow only in the deeper gulches where the packed snow of winter resisted the thaws of spring to the last. The wearing of the nosegay was so out of keeping with the character that Bart had assumed as to attract attention. The sergeant wondered that the men arguing behind him had not already noticed and questioned its presence.

Kneeling ostensibly to tie a bootlace, he rectified the girl's mistake by plucking forth the flowers and tucking them into an inside pocket of his coat. The others, although approaching, evidently had not noticed this deft appropriation. Ruth

Duperow's connection with the tragedy was her secret unless later she wished to take the camp into her confidence.

"It's a cinch that these two killings are linked," Hardley was shrilling to all ears within range. "When I get the man that killed the sergeant, I'll have the man that shot the B. C. X. driver; and, vice versa, if I get the man that killed the stage driver, I'll have the one that shot the sergeant."

"Which one do you calculate to get first, Sam?" asked Brewster, straight-faced as an undertaker.

The pudgy deputy stared at him in momentary suspicion, then took the bait. "Cato the Ox might be excused a fool question like that, Phil, but I'd have thought you'd be wise to vice versa. Don't you see, man, that these murderers are one and the same?"

"Then I'd advise you to throw down on that one and the same quick as the Almighty will let you," said Brewster. "The Mounties will be riled to the core over the killing of one of their own; they'll swarm in here like flies as soon as the news gets out."

The mining camp's deputy coroner was obvi-

ously disturbed by this logical counsel. Although the morning was not warm, he whipped out a saffron-colored handkerchief and mopped his brow. Evidently that ministration did not satisfy for he took off his hat and polished his pate, which was disclosed to be as bald as an eagle's.

"'Spite your astonishing ignorance in some things, Phil, you sometimes show a glimmer of sense," he said at last. "I was headed right in the first place. I've got to make some arrests and have the victims ready for the Mounties when they come swarming."

His eyes, while delivering himself of this pronouncement, had fixed on the sergeant.

"Victims—you said it," offered Seymour in calculating defense. "Some arrests. I suppose you'll make a bunch of them. Well, start in with me and bring in lots of company. You might as well make the mounted police plumb disgusted with you while you're about it." For a moment he watched Hardley squirm under this obvious scorn, then added: "Isn't a coroner's inquest the first of orderly procedure in a case of this sort? If you get a verdict from a jury, you'll have some-

thing to stand on when--when the Mounties come."

Hardley embraced the offering found in Seymour's sudden change from scorn to a practical suggestion. "I'll have an inquest with all due respect to the law, just as soon as we can get the late staff-sergeant into town," he shrilled. "See that you stick around, stranger. There's no telling at who the coroner's jury will point the finger of guilt."

Seymour nodded agreement. From official experience, he knew that there was no telling.

CHAPTER XVI

THE "WIDDY" IN GRAY

IN the slipshod procedure of Deputy Sam Hardley the professional policeman had an illustration of why the force of which he was a member was needed to supplement some county peace officers of the Dominion. Although the fat official undoubtedly believed a commissioned officer of the mounted police had been murdered in cold blood while in the pursuit of duty, his handling of the case proved most perfunctory. There was no close study of the immediate surroundings; not even a beating of the bush to determine the point from which the fatal shot was fired.

The fact that the victim's revolver had been fired once was noted, not by Hardley, but by the citizen addressed as Phil Brewster who, it developed, operated a freight packing business between Gold and the creeks. Doubtless, the tragedy of the express driver had been handled with similar care-

lessness, and this unlucky Bart Caswell given every opportunity to launch his daring impersonation.

About all that Hardley did was go through the pockets of the uniform while one of the crowd made a list of contents as they were produced and placed in a large handkerchief. There was a wallet meagerly supplied with small bills, a pocket knife, a ring of keys and a briar pipe—not any of which were familiar to Seymour. But there was in addition a certified copy of his own commission as staff-sergeant of the R. C. M. P., which had been in the war bag, and a sheaf of official blanks. These proceeds of the search were knotted within the handkerchief and deposited in Hardley's pocket, presumably to be handed over to the Mounted.

Soon, the waiting freight wagon was impressed into service as a rude catafalque. With the horse-men in procession formed behind, the cortege headed for the near-by camp. Its pace, at least, was funereal, thanks to oxen deliberation.

Once into the main street, Seymour found a semblance of permanency in the town. The establishments of two rival trading companies were

built of logs and surprisingly fronted by show windows. The one hotel, in distinction from several bunk houses, had two stories, with a false front atop the second. Seymour noted also a restaurant, a chop house, a pool hall, several "soft" drink emporiums—all of rough board construction.

A shack of slabs, roofed with cedar shakes, crouched beside the hotel and supported the sign:

OFFICE OF SHERIFF
GOLD BRANCH
OFFICE OF CORONER

Evidently it was from the door of this that Deputy Coroner Hardley had seen the imposter set out on his fatal ride.

Near this shack stood the temporary post office which divided a store room with the records of the mining recorder. The First Bank of Gold occupied a tent with a wooden floor. For the reassurance of customers and for the information of all, this tent wore a banner on which was painted: "Our palatial permanent home is under construction across the street." Glancing in that direction,

the stranger saw a structure of corrugated iron, awaiting a roof.

Gold, at this season of the year, was a night town, so the streets had been practically deserted as the small procession entered. Even though most of the population was at work up the creeks, there was something of an outpouring into King Street as the news of the shooting spread.

Some fifty men and a scattering of women gathered to mill about the freight wagon soon after the oxen were halted before Hardley's shack. From the vantage of his saddle seat, Seymour studied their faces as they received the news, but caught no trace of any emotion that interested him. All seemed genuinely shocked; none, too deeply moved. He heard many express regret over such a drastic blow at the law. If any rejoiced, they did so secretly.

Deputy Hardley consulted with important citizens, identified for Seymour by the one nearest his stirrup as the bank manager, the camp doctor, and the principal realtor. Presently the deputy shrilled an announcement that in his capacity of coroner he would swear a jury and hold an in-

quest at one o'clock in the uncompleted bank building.

The freight wagon, its somber burden covered with tarpaulin, was drawn to a position at the rear of the unfinished structure, which was open where workmen were laying a heavy flooring for a vault. The townsmen, their curiosity satisfied, began to disperse about their mundane affairs.

In turning Kaw to be about his own, Seymour came face to face with Ruth Duperow, who evidently had just reached town and at speed, for her mount was puffing. The color of excitement was high in the girl's cheeks. But no hint that she ever had seen him before came from the young woman who, within the hour, had been so solicitous of his welfare as to try to keep him from entering the brush in search of the murderer. Her eyes did not avoid his; they simply did not know him.

Having administered this puzzling cut direct, she focused on the gallant figure of Brewster who rode alongside her, his handsome face alight with undoubted admiration.

"What has happened?" Seymour heard her ask.

"Your dashing sergeant-of-staff has been murdered." Brewster's reply was fittingly low.

The girl's eyes flashed angrily. "Terrible! I must say you don't seem greatly distressed, Mr. Brewster, and I'll thank you not to connect me with the poor brave man by saying *my* sergeant."

"You've been seeing so much of this Bart person, Ruth, you hadn't had any time for your old friends. Of course, I'm sorry for the way he's been put out of the running, but——"

"That 'but' does you small credit. Who do you suppose——"

"Hardley hasn't decided yet." Seymour caught the flicker of contempt in the freighter's eyes. "Better come and have dinner with me at the hotel; this isn't our tragedy."

Her displeasure seemed increased, and she gathered her reins. "I wouldn't think of it," she said with decision. "I must carry the dreadful news to uncle."

Whirling her horse, she dashed away up the road over which she had so lately come.

"Some actress, but why?" murmured Seymour.

There were several why's that the sergeant found

it necessary to consider. Why had she cut him at their second meeting? Why had she feigned entire ignorance of what had happened? He could only hope that the same answer would serve for all—that she had acted so in the hope of being more free to work out a solution of the mystery as to who had killed Bart.

It was evident from Brewster's complaining attitude that the imposter had paid Miss Dupe-
row enough attention to arouse the handsome freighter's jealousy. And Brewster had mis-
played his hand by allowing his feeling to crop
out at such a moment when he should have shown
the murderer's detection and punishment to be his
chief interest. He now stood staring up the street
after her, looking utterly discomfited.

Dismounting, Seymour led Kaw across the street
and joined Brewster, who snapped out of his mood
upon being addressed. The information the ser-
geant sought was pleasantly given.

The stranger undoubtedly could get a room,
such as it was, at the Bonanza Hotel. Brewster
himself lived there. The "eats" weren't much,
but he could take pot-luck at the restaurant. If

his room wasn't airy enough, he could get ample ventilation by poking his finger through the partitions. He'd find the stables "around back." There was no telegraph office—yet, and no radio. Yes, the camp was a little slow in catching up with the times. The next mail would go out in the morning.

"Guess I'd better tell that suspicious deputy where I'm stopping," Seymour remarked when duly posted.

Brewster laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "Don't mind Sam Hardley, stranger. By now his mind is loping along some other line of suspicion. Better come to the inquest, though. With Hardley in the coroner's seat it will be better than vaudeville."

The sergeant did attend the inquest in the unroofed bank building, where the workmen had "laid off" for the "event." That he did not find it as amusing as Brewster had promised was not entirely due to the queer feeling that came with every mention of his name as that of the central figure. He writhed at the official flounderings of Hardley, who made an exhibition of a jury which,

under sensible direction, would have proved competent.

Seymour had heard strange coroners' verdicts before, but that which this fat deputy sponsored was a prize-winning oddity. Hardley read it aloud:

"We, the jury in this murder case duly impaneled, do and now hereby report that Staff-Sergeant Russell Seymour of the Royal Mounted Canadian Police, in the pursuit of duty in the proximity of Gold, B. C., did come to an untimely death to the regret of this afflicted law-abiding community.

"We, the jury, etc., do find and hereby report further that the aforesaid lamented Seymour was murdered by a rifle bullet fired by the man who held up the B. C. X. stage and killed Ben Tabor, driver thereof and subject of the last preceding inquest of this court, both being foul and fatal murders.

"We, the jury, etc., do find and hereby report still further, that Deputy Coroner Samuel Hardley, Esq., reached the scene of the tragedy with commendable promptitude. We direct him to draw such posse as he finds necessary from amongst the citizens of Gold

and run to earth the perpetrator of these dastardly crimes; and, furthermore, we express our confidence that he will leave no stone unturned to justify his reputation as a fearless officer with the encomiums of a successful capture dead or alive."

Hardley's shrill voice was softened by the huskiness of proudful emotion as he finished the reading. From his seat on an empty packing box in the front row of spectators, Phil Brewster uttered a fervent "A-men!" then, catching the eye of Seymour who stood along the wall, he winked sardonically.

"Needless to say, fellow citizens of Gold," Hardley shrilled on after having cleared his throat, "your officer appreciates the confidence of which this jury of his peers has so fitly delivered itself. He will leave no stone unturned to bring to a rope's end the foul fiend guilty of sending to perdition these two men, one a brave officer of the law and the other a worthy driver of the B. C. X. mules. He would respectfully suggest that before you leave this temporary temple of justice, so kindly loaned for the occasion by the public-

spirited manager of the First Bank of Gold, each and every one of you look for the last time on one who gave his life that this should be a more decent and law-loving mining camp."

For this last suggestion, Seymour could forgive Hardley's astonishing lack of modesty, even his consigning to "perdition" the two casualties. Although the fat deputy could not have imagined it, he had done the sergeant a pronounced favor.

Seymour lost no time in gaining a position from which he could watch the reaction on every face that looked upon Bart. His attention was caught by a little woman of pleasing countenance, in a drab dress and the beflowered hat of an outsider, whom he had noticed casually during the hearing. Now that the line had thinned to nothing and even the deputy had left his guard-of-honor post, the little woman came forward haltingly and bent over the rude catafalque. Seymour could not see her face for the moment as it was shadowed by her hat brim, but he heard a stifled sob. For an instant, she tottered and seemed so likely to fall that he took a quick step toward her. His aid, however, proved unnecessary. With a shudder, she recov-

ered herself and hurried away, dabbing at her eyes with a bit of cambric.

As the only individual who had shown the least personal emotion, the policeman's interest followed her. So did his steps. Outside, he felt fortunate when he fell in with an acquaintance of the morning, Cato, the driver of oxen.

"Who is the little woman in gray?" he asked casually.

"She's a widdy, but not looking for a second," Cato's face was more twisted than usual by its sarcastic grin.

"And I'm not seeking a first," Seymour set him straight. "I asked because she seemed more affected than the other women by Hardley's tribute line."

The old ox driver seemed reassured. "She's just a big-hearted Jane, owner and cook of the Home Restaurant down the street yonder. The sergeant boarded with her before he bloomed out in the royal uniform. I boarded there too, until she turned me down. I'm just wondering—was it him in the offing that made her cold towards me? Course, he wouldn't look at her, not serious; him

being a staff-sergeant in secret. But women nurse wild hopes—'specially widdies. Maybe I'd have a chance now he's been plugged into the discard."

Seymour glanced at him in amazement; that he, with his caricature of a face, could speak of women nursing wild hopes.

Evidently Cato read his thoughts. "You needn't look so doubtful, stranger." He flared with resentment. "Ox driving brings mighty smart wages up here, and I got a claim on Hoodoo Creek that may make me one of them mill'onaires when I get round to working of it next winter. Women can read behind the mask—'specially widdies."

Anxious to be off on the trail of his hunch, the sergeant was not sorry when they came to the Brewster warehouse and Cato left to inquire about his next load of freight for the creeks. Russell Seymour felt suddenly hungry—for home cooking.

CHAPTER XVII

RICHER THAN GOLD

THERE was no one visible in the Home Restaurant when Seymour entered. While talking to Cato, however, he had seen the woman unlock the door and disappear within, and now, after he had shut the door noisily behind him, he heard someone moving behind the partition in the rear. He had time to make choice between a seat at one of the two small tables or a stool at the oilcloth-covered counter beside the range. Presently she came into the room. He was seated at the counter.

That she had been crying was evident; also that she had made an effort to remove the traces. Inwardly Seymour regretted that he had not left her alone longer with her grief.

"I'll leave it to you, ma'am," he said as she came to take his order. "Whatever is easiest for you in the way of a square meal."

She murmured an apology for Gold's scanty markets, but thought she'd be able to feed him

without falling back on the can-opener. Bread had been baked that morning, she told him, as she set out a stack of soft slices. But she could not speak as encouragingly about the butter's age.

Seymour liked her voice, understanding its sad inflection, and he could feel full sympathy for her wan smile. Fortunately the range was directly in front of his seat; he could study her without seeming rude as she placed a steak to broil and sliced potatoes for a raw-fry.

In the course of his intent study of her, his hope grew that something valuable could be drawn from her. With the second sip of coffee, he broke bluntly into the matter in hand. "Well, they got poor Bart at last, I see!" he remarked.

He could see that he had startled her, as he had intended to do. She looked at him sharply, as if to make sure he was the stranger she had taken him to be. For a moment he feared she was going to break into tears, but with an effort she controlled herself, evidently being no stranger to sorrow.

"You knew Bart—the sergeant?" she asked, choking back a sob.

"In a way of speaking—yes," said Seymour. "I know that he was not an officer of the Royal Mounted."

With uncertain steps she felt her way along the lunch counter.

"Not—not an officer?" she faltered. "Why, what do you mean, sir?"

"Just what I say, madam. What's more, I *know* that Bart's sudden taking makes you a sure-enough widow, instead of a pretended one. You have my deepest sympathy, Mrs. Caswell."

To himself, Seymour justified his seeming harshness of utterance on grounds of professional necessity; that there might be real mercy for the woman also involved, in case he succeeded in breaking through her reserve, was another consideration. Everything depended upon her reaction to this "shot" assertion. He had followed her on a hunch bred of her emotions at the imposter's bier. Old man Cato had given him a plausible reason for her showing of grief. While studying her when she stood over the range, however, the idea had come to him that she had been Bart Caswell's wife. He was prepared to be shown that the

woman herself was not a criminal, even by inclination. In fact, he was predisposed to believe that she would prove essentially honest.

"You're wrong, stranger—wrong on both counts!" the woman replied. She had steadied herself, was forcing her voice to hold an even tone. Seymour could not yet be sure that his hunch was right.

"Mr. Seymour *was* a staff-sergeant," she went on. "The coward that murdered him will learn that to his sorrow when Russell's mates come from headquarters to avenge his death. As for my being his widow——" She essayed a little laugh that was almost too much a strain upon her histrionic powers. "I'm not saying what might have come to pass had not death stepped in; but as it stands, he was just a brave friend and a good-paying boarder."

A moment the sergeant merely stared at her; then he leaned along the counter toward her. "You'd like to see your brave friend's slayer punished, wouldn't you?"

A flash of fury lit her worn face; her teeth

clicked ominously and her small, work-roughened hands clinched.

"I'd give the world if it were mine and count it well spent!" she cried. "If ever I find out who—" She checked herself, evidently fearing that she was going too far in behalf of a "brave friend and a good-paying boarder."

"Then tell me all you can about Bart, his recent movements and what he had planned for the future," urged Seymour quietly. "I'm here to get the man who killed him, Mrs. Caswell."

Probably it was more his repetition of that "Mrs. Caswell" than his declaration of purpose that suddenly unnerved her. It was such convincing indication that her denials had not been believed. She sank into a chair that stood by the front window and buried her face in her hands. She looked so hopeless that Seymour's heart was wrung with pity for her. His hunch had been right, but there was no need now to press it unfeelingly. She should have all the time she needed for sobbing readjustment.

"How come you to think you know so much

about him—about us?” she asked presently without looking up.

“I know, ma’am. I am the real Russell Seymour—the sergeant whose uniform he wore.”

His mask was off. He had been more frank than at first he intended to be, but, in all circumstances, he considered the temporary secret of his identity safe with her.

Bart’s widow started up in her chair. “Here so soon!” she exclaimed.

“Not soon enough, though, I’m sorry to say. If the Force had planted a detachment here with the first Chinook, probably your husband would not have been tempted to hold up the B. C. X.”

Mrs. Caswell groaned in her anguish. “You know—about—about that, too?”

“Naturally. How else would he get possession of my uniform? Tell me, madam; what did he expect to gather in when he held up the baggage stage? It’s a cinch that he couldn’t have known that my clothes were in transit.”

But the little woman was not persuaded to answer at once. Seymour had to show her his official shield, which he had taken from its place

of concealment in his trail pack when he stabled the horses before the inquest. He went to some pains, also, to show her that although she was an accessory after the crime, no charge would be placed against her if she helped in unraveling the latest murder.

He pointed out that, in view of the stolen uniform in which Bart had been killed, she could not hope to prevent the fatal stage robbery from being laid to him.

"But I can save his memory the disgrace of a brutal murder!" the widow cried, as though suddenly persuaded that the officer was a genuine one. She fluttered out of her chair into a more confidential position at the counter.

"Bart did shoot Ben Tabor but he had to fire in self-defense. It was his life or Tabor's; he made a brave man's choice." She paused a moment to catch a sob that seemed determined to escape, then proceeded to eulogize as best she might. "Bart Caswell was the gentlest of men. I never knew of his harming a soul before. Except for his wrong idea that the world owed him a liv-

ing and his peculiar way of collecting it, there is nothing that could be said against him."

"I'm ready to be shown, Mrs. Caswell," the sergeant encouraged her.

He listened then to the old, old story of the double-cross in a new setting and with unusual variations. The First Bank of Gold, according to the widow, used considerable currency in its purchase of dust from the miners. To guard against robbery, the shipments were made in supposed secrecy by the weekly baggage stage, but the driver knew of the valuable load he carried occasionally. Caswell and Tabor had been friends in Vancouver before either came into the north country and soon after their meeting in Gold, the robbery had been planned.

Bart had "stuck" the stage at the agreed point, only to be told by Tabor that the expected \$30,000 shipment for that week had been withheld. Not then suspicious, Bart had accepted the statement as fact, expressed his hope that they'd have better luck next time, and was disappearing into the brush when Tabor fired upon him. The bullet struck a silver plate in Bart's back that had been

placed there to repair a wound received during a Seattle gun-fight some years before.

The blow staggered him, but he was uninjured. Turning as his friend was in the act of firing again, he had brought down the traitor with a single shot.

A hurried search of the express book showed that the currency shipment had been made. Driving the stage off the trail, Bart had examined the load thoroughly but had found no bank package. He concluded that Tabor had concealed it somewhere along the trail, meaning to get the whole of the loot for himself after putting the blame on the friend he expected to kill.

Watchful for flaws in the widow's account, Seymour seized upon a seeming one. "But if Bart had been killed in the brush, no loot would have been found on him," he pointed out. "Tabor still would have been held responsible for the currency."

"They had planned in advance," she smiled wearily, "that Tabor should report his stage robbed by three masked men. He need only have

sworn that the other two got away with the bank package."

Seymour made mental note of at least one way of checking up on Mrs. Caswell's account, then asked her about the uniform.

"Your bag was the only thing on the wagon that Bart thought might be of use to him," she admitted with an air of frankness that was convincing. "He brought it here—to a room he was supposed to have been renting from me—in the half story above the restaurant. When I found him there trying on the suit, he told me about his hard luck."

The sergeant felt that the crux of the interview was approaching, but meant to get at it gradually, retaining the full advantage of the confidence he had established.

"The idea of impersonating an officer of the Mounted—was that merely to assure him a get-away for the Tabor killing?" he asked.

"Partly to delay an investigation of that by pretending to have undertaken it himself; more to help him in another enterprise he had in view up the creeks."

Considering a moment, Seymour ventured:

"Having failed in landing the bank currency, he was going after gold in the raw, perhaps?"

"He told me there was something richer than gold——"

The noisy opening of the street door interrupted. They glanced up to see Cato entering. Looking like a horrid gnome, with his long arms dangling almost to the ground from his misshapen shoulders, the ox driver advanced to a stool one removed from Seymour. Upon this he pulled himself, after giving his neighbor the merest of nods. From the odor of his breath, he evidently had fortified himself for this untimely visit with bottled courage. He leered at the widow as if he considered himself assured of welcome now that his attractive rival had been eliminated.

"'Tis a starving man you see before you, Mary, Queen of Scots," he declared. "But a starving man with a jingle in his pockets. With all the goings-on in camp, I'm rejoiced that the Home is open for serving meals that is meals."

Recalling the hope which Cato had expressed on the street a short while before, Seymour wondered how long he would have to wait for an

opportunity to finish his interview. He attacked the steak that had been neglected, hoping that the old man would be too engrossed in his "chances" to notice that the meat was cold.

"I haven't forgotten that second cup of coffee, sir," the widow had presence of mind enough to offer. "If you'll be wishing for supper this evening, please come in by eight as I'll be closing early."

Seymour took this as both his dismissal and an appointment for the widow to finish. Until eight o'clock, then, he would have to wait to know what Bart Caswell had in mind that was richer than gold and was to be had on the Creeks of Argonaut with the aid of a Royal Canadian police uniform.

CHAPTER XVIII

A CRYPTIC MESSENGER

FROM the Home Restaurant, the sergeant went to the stables where already he had made his horses comfortable. He secured a clothes poke from the pack of his outfit. The Bonanza Hotel proved advantageously informal in that he was asked "two dollars a night in advance," instead of being confronted with a register for his name and address. A key, attached to a tin disk too large for any normal pocket, was tossed to him by the grouchy boniface, who informed him he would find No. 12 at the head of the stairs.

Opening a canvas door supported on a pair of leather hinges, Seymour entered a tiny room lighted by a single window. It was furnished to the minimum with a blanketed cot, a chair and a table of the roughest construction.

As he sat on the edge of the cot, he recalled the crowded events of the life that had been his in the few months since the strangulation of Oliver

O'Malley. Up at Armistice post, by now, the first mail must have arrived. Constable La Marr would know that a "court" was about to start from Ottawa to give Olespe of the Lady Franklin band a trial for his life. He'd know, too, that Avic would not be tried just then because the case against him would be incomplete without the testimony of Harry Karmack, the fugitive factor who undoubtedly had robbed the Arctic Trading Company. And when would he find Karmack—when and where? And Moira O'Malley, when would she arrive in Gold to join her bereaved father until that capture time?

The events of the day, however, were too stressing for his practical mind to long concern itself with anything but the matter immediately at hand.

"Richer than gold!" The last words of the widow kept recurring to his thoughts. What could this presumptuous crook of the wilds have had in mind? The sergeant could think, of course, of commodities that were more precious than the yellow metal, but of none that were indigenous to that upper corner of British Columbia.

So he puzzled over the remark until he con-

cluded that Bart must have used a figure of speech. He would await the widow's interpretation.

Seymour was not surprised to find that he did not think of Mrs. Caswell as a participant in Bart's outlawry. Without protestations of innocence or any oral plea that she had tried in vain to reform the daring rascal, she had acquitted herself of culpability. The weary lines in the face that must have been beautiful not so long ago, the haunted look in her dark eyes, even her superb first effort at denial had won the Mountie's sympathy.

A knock on the canvas door of his room interrupted his study of the local situation. Arising, he unhooked the latch, whereupon the improvised door swung inward of its own weight and the accord of its makeshift hinges.

Disclosed in the frame, filling it perpendicularly but sadly lacking in horizontal proportions, stood a gaunt, miner-clad figure, distinguished by a pair of deep-set eyes which burned like living coals and a shock of white hair which waved its freedom when his slouch hat was removed.

"Will you pardon me, stranger; no intrusion

meant." The voice was soft and a smile of utmost benignity came into play. "In the midst of life, we are in death."

"The missionary—Moirra O'Malley's father and the uncle of the morning's colorful trailmate!" was Seymour's instant thought; but he gave no sign of the presumed recognition.

"Safe enough statement in this camp to-day," he said to his visitor.

"I'm the sky-pilot of these diggings," the other announced in a pulpit voice that rumbled through the hall.

"Won't you come in, sir?"

The missionary declined with a shake of his head. "I must hasten on my weekly rounds, distributing lessons from the Word. Won't you accept one of these and promise me to read it?" He held out a small tract taken from a handful which he carried.

The sergeant glanced at the title: "What Shall It Profit a Man——" He smiled tolerantly, thinking what a queer yet lovable character his future life's companion had for a parent.

"It is not meet that we should be seen in con-

ference," O'Malley's voice had been lowered to a whisper; then suddenly it boomed so that all beneath the roof might hear: "I trust you will read that tract, brother—read and profit thereby." And with that, he stalked down the hall as though in search of other needy souls.

Seymour watched him. On getting no answer from the next door, the gaunt frame stooped to slip a tract under it. At another a woman answered his knock and a "sister" was informed that in the midst of life she was in death.

Back in his room, Seymour pondered the single whispered sentence with which the sky pilot varied what evidently were his wonted words when distributing tracts. Had Moira written that he had started for Gold and that he knew more than anyone in the world about the family's Arctic tragedy?

But that was impossible, for he had been able to spend but a moment with the girl when orders came to him at Montreal to report at once to the assistant commissioner in command of "E" Division at Vancouver. Seymour himself had not known then that he would eventually arrive in plain clothes at her father's mission station.

What, then, could the whisper mean unless there was a message—temporal rather than spiritual—for him hidden somewhere in the pamphlet?

But when he shook its leaves, no enclosure dropped out. He examined the margins without raising a sign. The inside back cover was blank but nothing had been written thereon. He remembered that the missionary had picked the tract seemingly at random from a pack of several dozen and he was discouraged.

Still, the whisper persisted. "It is not meet that we be seen in conference"—he recalled every significant word of it. Surely such words had not been spoken at random. Drawing the chair to the window, he sat down and began a more intensive study of the printed sheet. Soon, an ink dot beneath a letter rewarded him; then others. Presently he picked out a sequence of dotted letters spelling "P-a-r-d-o-n."

The process reminded him of reading sun-heliograph or taking a blinker message at night. Undoubtedly the communication was of importance that the girl should have gone to such trouble to assure secrecy. The uncle, too, must have shared

the secret or he could not have been trusted to pick out the message-dotted tract. From his clothes poke, the sergeant took out a writing pad and with his pencil set the indicated letters into words, with this final result:

P-a-r-d-o-n m-y v-a-m-o-s-e a-n-d c-u-t B-o-t-h
f-o-r g-o-o-d o-u-r c-a-u-s-e B-a-r-t s-a-i-d y-o-u
c-o-m-i-n-g t-o h-e-l-p N-o-w m-u-s-t c-a-r-r-y o-n
a-l-o-n-e B-e c-a-r-e-f-u-l K-e-e-p s-i-l-e-n-t C-o-m-e
o-u-r c-a-b-i-n l-a-t-e t-o-n-i-g-h-t G-r-e-e-n
R-i-v-e-r a-t G-l-a-c-i-e-r R-u-t-h D-u-p-e-r-o-w.

The message amazed him on more than one count. She had "left him cold" at the point of discovery and later on refused to recognize him on the streets of Gold for the good of "our cause." What cause? Unless that was her way of indicating law and order, he knew of no *cause* they had in common. Again, he was to "carry on alone." What did she expect him to carry on?

Of course, he meant to carry on until he had the man who would have kidnapped Moira O'Malley, except for the enactments of the snows. But why go back to Moira? This cousin was of

a different type. Beautiful, to be sure, but not his sort of beauty—not the sort that thrilled and held him. He stopped ruminating with a jerk. Almost had he forgot——

Most puzzling of all was that “Bart said *you* were coming.” Who did she think he was, anyway? That she had made a faulty surmise of some sort was evidenced by the fact that she still held the crook at his assumed sergeancy value.

As for the rest of the message, nothing would please him better than to accept the strangely sent invitation to call. It would mean getting in touch with Moira quicker than he could hope to do if he continued his incognito rôle in the camp.

Seymour turned his attention for some time, then, to an intensive study of the blue print map of the district which he had purchased at the surveyor’s office on riding into Gold that morning. His hope was to find a way toward the creeks after nightfall without asking questions.

His morning course to the point where he had overtaken the boyish-looking rider was easily traced, and thence into town. Working back, he found the trail over which Ruth Duperow had

come and followed that to the mouth of Glacier Creek. Evidently the girl, for some reason, had taken a roundabout course that morning, for he found that a more direct trail to town followed the Cheena. His acquaintance with the Indian tongue was sufficient to spare him the map-maker's mistake of adding the word river to a name that really included it in the "na" suffix.

From such detail as was drawn into the map, he judged that Glacier was not much of a creek. It appeared to start in a nest of glaciers and to flow through a cañon as from the neck of a bottle. Between the Cheena and the cañon was drawn a square with a legend, "Indian Mission." That no mining claims were marked off on this creek, although those surrounding it were well staked, seemed remarkable; but the stranger did not try to guess the answer.

For no other reason than that the name had lodged in his mind, Seymour sought out Hoodoo Creek on the map and found the claim accredited to Cato—Thirteen Above. If the long-armed ox-man cited it in advancing his hopes with the

widow, Seymour hoped that the number would exert its supposedly baleful influence.

From the blue-print, he turned to writing a report to his chief in Vancouver to whom word of the murder of his "Staff-Sergeant Russell Seymour" had undoubtedly been sent without delay. He took a grim sort of enjoyment in an opening after Mark Twain:

"I have the honor to state my safe arrival in Gold, B. C. Any reports of my violent death that may reach you are *slightly* exaggerated."

In the terse English that has made mounted police reports models of modesty, he told how he had "run into" two murder mysteries in addition to the embezzlement case which had brought him from the Far North. One of these, with its accompanying stage robbery, he believed he had solved except for stray angles that did not affect the capital crime. He was at work on the second murder case, with fair progress.

Over his final paragraph, which was headed "Suggestions," according to the form followed by the Force in official communications, he pondered deeply. Whatever he wrote there, he had reason

to believe, would be incorporated into an order soon after passing under Assistant Commissioner Baxter's eyes. On this particular independent command, he was anxious not to make mistakes. Finally he wrote:

"Am not prepared to pass judgment, at this time, on the permanency of Gold. From what I have seen, however, the district sadly needs Dominion policing. Would suggest that you send at your earliest convenience one (1) sergeant and two (2) constables, mounted and with suitable camp equipment. As I may be working under cover on this second, unsolved murder, please instruct the sergeant to make camp on his own responsibility and act accordingly until he hears from me. Tell him to disregard reports of my demise as unfounded and——"

A strident "Come in!" evidently in answer to a knock he had not heard, sounded in the adjoining room and caused him to raise his pen from the paper with the sentence incomplete.

"Hello Brewster, glad I found you in."

The shrilled greeting was in an unmistakable voice. Its wording informed Seymour that the

agreeable freighter of his morning's acquaintance was his immediate hotel neighbor.

"What can I do for you, Hardley, you honorable strong arm of the law?"

The voice was Brewster's—the same that had remarked the thinness of the tar-paper partitions. They were veritable sounding boards. Seymour could hear every word.

"Wanted to ask your advice, Phil, about some points in this Mountie's murder."

The genuine sergeant winced involuntarily. It was a very bad joke. He doubted that he ever would become accustomed to Sergeant Seymour spoken of as murdered—done for.

"Shoot," he heard Brewster invite.

"It's this way, Phil. Seymour must have been quite a responsible member of the Force. As you said this a. m., his snuffing is going to make a noisy roar-baek. I got to report it to somebody in the Mounted—but who and whereat?"

Seymour fidgeted uneasily in the silence that followed, evidently due to Brewster's considering his answer. He detested eavesdropping; never had resorted to it on any of his cases. By way of

letting the two in the adjoining room know of his presence, he scraped his chair noisily over the bare floor. This warning, however, failed to check Brewster, or even to lower his voice.

"I remember reading that Vancouver is the nearest staff-office of this new Canadian Mounted Police, but I've just been thinking—— If they send a lot of Mounties into Gold and run down these stage-robbing murderers, you're not going to get any credit. I'm strong for home industry, even in justice. Why don't you delay reporting the sergeant's death until you land your man?"

"Say you're a real friend, Phil, even if you do try to ride me sometimes. I need the credit for turning a trick like that. It might make me sheriff when the old man gets through. But—but would I dare?"

Seymour started for the hall but on the way, heard Brewster's reply:

"Write your report, Sam, but don't post it until after tomorrow's mail has gone. That'll give you a week. Then address the letter to Ottawa, which will give you a few days more. In that time, you ought to have the murderers rounded up. You

can forget what I told you about there being any Vancouver headquarters."

Surprise at such advice from a seemingly public-spirited citizen delayed Seymour's knock until he had heard it through. Of course, all this might be merely a sign of real, though mistaken, friendship for Hardley. On the other hand, was it possible that Brewster had personal reasons for wishing to delay the coming of the Mounted?

With this question to the fore of his mind, Seymour knocked on the adjoining door and was invited in. His entry seemed not to disturb either of the two.

"Just wanted to tell you that the next room is occupied and that the partition between is more or less of a megaphone," he said in a light tone. "If you've any secrets——"

Brewster's laugh was natural enough to be reassuring. "If we were talking secrets, stranger, we'd take to the brush. I've lived in the Bonanza since the day it was opened, and I don't even think secrets behind these make-believe walls."

The sergeant dismissed his unintentional eavesdropping with a shrug and turned to the deputy.

"Out on the trail this morning you seemed to think you might want me later. You'll know now where to find me—Room number twelve."

"Forget this a. m., old topper. I was maybe a little mite excited out there at the scene of the crime. There ain't sech a lot of difference between deputy sheriffs and mounted sergeants. It might-a been me lying there deader than dead. Your happening along looked sort of queer. I'm seeing straighter now. You're welcome to Gold and I hope you get what you come for."

"You'll find me strong for law and order," Seymour replied.

This seemed to invite Hardley to real confidences. Beckoning Seymour from the doorway, he edged his chair closer to the cot on which Brewster reclined in his stockinged feet.

"Don't mind telling you two in confidence," he leaned forward and whispered, "that I'm in a fair way to nabbing the two who robbed the stage and killed Tabor and Seymour. Maybe I ain't seemed to be doing much, but I've got clews to burn already."

"You have?" cried Brewster, hunching himself into a sitting position on the cot.

Hardley nodded assuredly. "There were two of them in the bush lying for the sergeant this morning. One had a Winchester 30-30 and used it to kill Seymour. One rode a horse that was shod in front but plain behind." He paused, evidently, from his expression, to collect the encomiums he considered his due.

"Important if true, Sam," Brewster observed.

"Quick work," admitted the Mountie, honestly surprised; his hand was in the trousers pocket that held the cartridge case picked up that morning. "How in the world did you learn all that?"

Hardley seemed to relish supplying the details, even though he had to whisper them. Apparently he had forgotten that one of his confidants was an utter stranger both to him and to the camp, one whose name even he did not know. His was country-official vanity advanced to the *n*th degree.

"Dr. Pratt dug out the bullet, which fixed the brand of the gun with which the deed was done. Then I've got a half-breed boy on my staff who's keen as a Gordon setter in the bush. He found

the horse track of the two from the scene of the crime. Now I'm looking for a man with a 30-30 repeater and a horse that's shy on shoes."

Surprised that Hardley should have shown so much initiative, and apprehensive that he was getting too near "home" for comfort, Seymour framed a diverting question.

"What do you know about the chap who was killed?"

"You mean this last one—Staff-Sergeant Seymour?" asked the deputy in turn, but merely as a preface, not waiting for an answer. "Kirby of the First Bank has heard of him. Says he was nicknamed 'Sergeant Scarlet' up in the Northwest territories, and is guilty of some of the hardest patrols ever made. He must have been a regular fighting machine. Autopsy proved that."

Sergeant Scarlet! That was the nickname Moira had given him! But others, to be sure, had used it before his beautiful Irisher. Perhaps his reputation as a man-getter had spread further than he knew.

Anyway, his chance to check up on Widow Caswell had arrived sooner than he expected. He

showed casual but sufficient interest in the disclosures mentioned.

"The sergeant had been under fire before, and more than once," declared Hardley. "The doctor found a silver plate bracing his spine high up between the shoulders. And, would you believe it, there was a dent in that plate which looked as if he'd been hit in the identical repair spot by some later bullet!"

"Checked to a T," thought Seymour of the widow's tale.

He became more than ever anxious to be clear of the talkative deputy. With all his false surmises, the natural-born bungler had corralled some accurate information and might make a deal of trouble for him. At first chance he got back to his room.

With a few swift strokes, he completed and signed his report. His O. C. must be prepared for that murder report, whether Hardley finally acted on Brewster's advice or not.

Hurrying from the hotel into King Street, Seymour found the post office and mailed his letter. Then, although the hour was only seven, he ad-

vanced casually upon the Home Restaurant. He was eager to be on his way to the creeks before Hardley stumbled, as possibly he might, upon the fact that Seymour's rifle, stored with his outfit, was a 30-30 and that Kaw was "shod in front and plain behind."

CHAPTER XIX

INTO THE NIGHT

“You were saying, Mrs. Caswell——”

Seymour's wait at one of the Home's small tables had been long drawn. The slender widow was worked “ragged” to cook and serve the tide of customers that, by perverse chance, had set in particularly strong that evening.

Fortunately, all were strangers to the sergeant and he congratulated himself that he had attracted only passing notice as he sat seemingly absorbed in an old fiction magazine, with his coffee never quite finished before him. He had gained nothing by coming early, for it was nearly nine o'clock when at last they found themselves alone.

“Are you too tired to talk, Mrs. Caswell? You've had a hard day,” the sergeant interrupted himself. The widow smiled wanly, a grateful light in her eyes, but replied that she would prefer to “have it over with.”

"Let me see," she considered, for appearance's sake supporting her weary self by leaning over a stool, instead of sitting down at the table beside him. "Where was I this afternoon when that old pest broke in?"

"I trust you punctured Cato's hopes?" The sergeant could not resist the momentary digression.

"The presuming ox had been drinking," she said. "He gave me,—well, let's call it an argument; but I had the last word. He'll not come bothering around here again."

After a smile and nod of approval, Seymour returned to their unfinished business. "You were telling me what Bart had in view up the creeks. Something 'richer than gold'—wasn't that the way you put it?"

"His very words," the widow went on in the glow of loving reminiscence. "Naturally, I was curious, for I thought the gold was all there was worth while up here. I asked him what he meant." With that, her lips were stilled and a dreamy look came into her eyes.

The sergeant did not believe that she had paused

with aggravating intent, or even from any sense of the dramatic. Doubtless, her thoughts were with the departed rogue. But that was no place at all for her to stop; he just couldn't wait longer to learn what in Gold was richer than gold.

"Yes—yes!" he prodded, glancing at his watch to suggest a time reason for his hurry.

"Why, Bart just took me into his arms in a gentle, big-bear way he had—at times—and said—I'll never forget; it made me so happy."

Again she was living over what evidently had been the big moment of her recent life; but that fact did not ease in the least Seymour's present impatience.

"Well, what did he say?"

"Bart said—'All you'll care to know, Marge old dear, is that I'm going to put something over in the name of the law and within it. I'm going to rectify a wrong. In the name of the Royal Mounted, I'm going to loot some looters.' That's what Bart said, and you can understand, Mr. Sergeant, how happy it made me."

For another brief moment, Margaret Caswell succeeded in forgetting her recent bereavement.

"That talk was the morning after the unfortunate stage—business," she went on with just a little break in her voice at the mention of the crime. "Bart went forth in his borrowed uniform to establish himself at the hotel as befits an officer. He dropped in here for supper and we had a fine talk. He told me that nobody seemed to doubt his authority and that the whole camp was breathing easier at sight of the scarlet and gold."

Exactly like a woman to be accurate about the clothes he wore, thought Seymour, and he pictured the swath the handsome crook must have cut in the new camp all excited with its first big crime.

"Bart knew that he would have to work fast," the woman was saying. "From letters or orders he found in the bag, he was aware that you would soon be coming in plain clothes. In spite of the fact that he would be acting in the name of the Law and that all his so-called lifting would be from Montreal crooks, he'd be forced to make a get-away over the Alaskan border, from there to catch some through steamer to the States."

"Montreal crooks!" More than ever was Sey-

mour now interested. Was it possible that, in that inexplicable way of the almost trackless wilds, his trail here would cross that of Harry Karmack's—that his unsolved assignment might be completed and his pact with Moira validated? Harry Karmack, he well knew, had been hand in glove with the worst of Montreal's underworld characters, although there the lawless element had been able to cover the embezzler.

But the woman was going on: "It was agreed that I'd stay right here running this eating place, until I heard from him. You see, it was safe enough, for we had been very careful and no one suspected that there was any relationship. After that evening, I never saw Bart again to speak to."

That she might not yield to this call upon her emotions, Seymour put out a couple of rapid fire questions. "You think, then, that one of these so-called Montreal crooks got him? Any line on them?"

"No line," she answered regretfully, after a moment's thought: "None at all, unless—There's a young woman he met up the creeks, a missionary's relative, I believe. I saw her speak to him

one day on King Street and, of course, he *had* to explain. He met her when he was just plain Barton Caswell and was out prospecting. From her uncle, he learned of the wrongs being done by the Montreal gang, but until that uniform fell into his hands, he did not conceive any way of getting the best of them. Perhaps these missionary folks can help you."

Evidently Bart had played his cards with the skill of an expert, thought Seymour. From the widow's impassioned admission she held no grudge against the Duperow girl. There had been no hint of slur in her tones that mentioned the younger, prettier woman. All this suggested that she must have had implicit faith in the crook's love for her.

Declaring his intention of looking up the mission folks, the sergeant returned to the subject of the loot. Had she asked no further about the nature of it?

"I surely did, but his answer was always the same. 'Richer than gold, Marge, richer than gold.' He said he'd be the first mounted policeman in the history of the Force to make a clean-up, even if

he was one only for a week. This stroke was to mean luxury for me, a home in an orange grove in California, diamond rings set in platinum, fine dresses—everything! I think this morning, when he rode out so bravely, that he hoped never to come back to Gold. The loot is up there in the creeks, you know, and Alaska is still further on. Any hour the real staff-sergeant—who has turned out to be you—might have ridden in, as, in truth, you did.”

Satisfied that the bandit’s widow withheld nothing worth while, Seymour was anxious to be off about the invitation which Ruth Duperow had “dotted” to him. He felt, however, that he owed Bart’s widow something for the information which, once she started to impart it, had been given so frankly. He was minded to pay at once, even if the coin thereof was only good advice.

“For the present, you had best sit tight here and say nothing, Mrs. Caswell,” he began. “I suppose it was easy come, easy go with Bart; that he leaves you practically nothing. From what I’ve seen of your trade this evening, you have a pay-

ing proposition in the restaurant. I don't see any reason why you can't go on with it."

"But when people know——"

"Maybe they need never know that Bart was anything but a boarder," Seymour interposed hopefully. "You seem to have guarded your secret well when even infatuated old Cato didn't suspect your man of being more than a suitor."

The little woman had been too distressed to give thought to her own future; naturally she seemed uncertain about it. Then suddenly the flame of that love which was beyond Seymour's comprehension, but within his appreciation, flared to decision.

"But they will have to know if I save Bart's reputation!" she cried. "I'll not have the world think he killed that double-crossing stage driver in anything but defense of his own life."

Here was complication which disturbed the plans that the Mountie, impelled by his rugged conviction that every person was entitled to a square deal, had been making for her. He had no time to argue with her, so went on to impress her with what was vital to his own operations.

He could work to a better advantage toward the

capture of Bart's slayer if the double unmasking was delayed. Her promise to say nothing until he gave her leave was his for the asking. The town folks would probably arrange an appropriate funeral for the dead "sergeant"; she would need to attend as a sorrowing acquaintance, but she must keep a tight rein on her emotions if she wished to aid in the capture. In this, ordeal though it would be, Mrs. Caswell promised to do her best.

As he arose to leave, he offered her his big hand. She reached out her small one timidly.

"I never thought I'd be shaking hands with a Mountie," she confessed in a murmuring voice, "I'm afraid I've hated you wearers of the scarlet, you were so all-sure of getting the men you went after and I never knew when Bart would fall into your clutches. But now——"

"That's all right, ma'am. You've helped a lot and I only hope I can get this crowd." He started for the door, but remembered one thing more. "That war bag of mine—I suppose Bart took it to the hotel when he moved. I'll be needing that other uniform when this mystery is cleared."

"The bag is still upstairs," she said quickly. "Bart only took some documents and papers besides what he wore. He didn't know but what his identity would be questioned when he suddenly changed from a mining expert to a policeman."

"And the room—is it rented?"

She shook her head.

"Then, if you'll accept me as a tenant until further notice we'll let the bag stay where it is. The rent?"

"I couldn't think of taking rent from you when you're working out my revenge," she said.

Seymour frowned. "I'm seeing that justice is done, madam," he said, referring to her use of the word revenge. "I am teaching Gold the value of human life. And I'll pay for the room—the usual rate."

To escape further discussion he hurried into the fallen night. Pondering the marvelous complexities of the women met in a day on the "Last Frontier," he nearly plumped into a mud hole which lay out front. Close to the shack lay a beaten path; this he followed. At the corner he was edging into the vacant lot which adjoined, when, with-

out a swish of warning, something blacker than night fell over him.

Instinctively he struck out at this blackness, his knuckles denting a yielding substance that had a fibrous touch. Before he could throw off its enveloping folds, he felt a pair of strong arms go around his waist. They closed in as with a gathering string. The covering evidently was a horse blanket judging by the smell.

As a sudden surge of fury against such artful man-handling lent him strength to thrash about, a heavy blow fell upon the back of his head. He felt his knees weaken under the shock of it, but clawed and strained to break the hold about his waist. A second hammering blow descended. His ability to struggle failed him. His knees gave way. He was sinking into vast depths. The Gold garroters, whoever they were and whatever their object, had got him. "Scarlet" Seymour was out!

CHAPTER XX

MORNING'S MAZE

THE awakening of Sergeant Seymour was painful; never before had he known that a head could ache with the throbs that were racking his. Presently his mind took hold of a fragmentary idea—horse-blanket. Upon this, after a mental struggle, he was able to spread a picture of his sorry going-out at the hands of some mining-camp thugs, doubtless intent on robbing him.

His next wonder was what had awakened him and by way of answering that, he opened his eyes for a look around, the greatest surprise of which was broad daylight. The sun, then, must have served as his alarm clock—called him out of that night which was darker than any he had ever known before. Now its rays were streaming into a cabin room in which he lay, fully clad, upon a straw-stuffed bunk.

He did not bother to get up just then; he merely lay back on the inadequate pillow of his slouch hat

and "listened" to the ache of his head. The idea that he had been robbed persisted. To his surprise, he found that the currency belt around his waist had not been disturbed. Surely mining camp crooks would know where to look for his valuables!

Then he slid his right hand over his chest to feel the holster that hung beneath his left arm. Greater surprise! His gun lay ready in its usual concealment.

The conclusions, painful in their process, were at once comforting and disturbing. He had not been trimmed or even frisked. Robbery could not have been the motive behind the attack outside the widow's restaurant. Then—what?

Slowly he raised himself to a sitting position upon the bare bunk and permitted his eyes to rove until they settled upon another shock to his tortured comprehension. This was found in the narrow window through which the sun was streaming. Iron bars crossed the opening. He must be a prisoner in jail.

"Deputy Sheriff Samuel Hardley, the strong arm of the law!"

He swung his feet to the floor and took a somewhat wabby stand. Further survey convinced him beyond doubt that he was in the blundering deputy's one-cell bastile. This proved to be built of logs with a door as thick as that of an ice box and studded with nails. The two windows were near the log ceiling, narrow, oblong and barred. There were three bunks along as many walls and a Yukon stove in the cell's center—no other furnishings, but enough for a frontier jail.

So, that was the lay of the cards, he mused darkly—the explanation of the surprise attack. After their talk in Brewster's room at the Bonanza, the fat deputy must have located Kaw—shod in front but plain behind—and his 30-30 rifle which he had left in the stable. Hardley had realized, then, that his ill-considered revelation of clues would have put his man on guard. Learning that Seymour, supposed murderer and robber of the stage, was in the restaurant he had made ambush and effected his arrest along safety-first lines.

There the deputy's caution seemed to have stopped, thought the sergeant, enjoying again the reinforcing feel of his gun. Neglect to search his

prisoner was quite in keeping with other official blunders which the fat man had made. Seymour would have to give Hardley credit, however, for effecting a silent, bloodless capture—with a blanket, as he remembered it.

Full assurance on this point awaited his glance. Almost at his feet lay the thing—a worn horse-blanket. Possibly the deputy had covered him with it before locking him in and, in the restlessness of thud-impelled slumber, Seymour had kicked it off.

A bottle that stood on the sheet iron stove invited inspection. Even before he picked it up, the stars on its label prepared him for the brandy smell which a sniff at its neck brought forth. If Hardley had been fortifying his courage with that high-powered stuff, it was no wonder he overlooked the gun. A drink of the liquor might have strengthened Seymour; but he realized he would need all his wit in the heated session which he meant should begin with the deputy's arrival at the jail. Lifting the stove top, he permitted the pint which remained in the bottle to gurgle into the ashes of some long-ago fire.

Seated on the edge of one of the bunks, he took stock of the situation. He had missed the late-night appointment at the O'Malley cabin on Glacier Creek. The missionary folk would think, probably, that they had left too much to his intuition in their excess of caution. That, however, meant only delay and, while hours were precious, he would make up for lost time once free of Hardley's detecting.

It began to look as though he was not a huge success as a plain clothes man. He had taken off his mask for Bart's widow. Ruth Duperow evidently believed him to be a constable come to aid the murdered "sergeant." Now it seemed likely that he would be forced to make a confidant of the talkative Hardley in order to be able to carry on at all. If Bart had not made the uniform a conspicuous target for one bad outfit of that region, he'd be tempted to at once climb into the scarlet which the bandit had left unworn. Never had he liked under-cover patrols, but in this particular case, he felt that "civies" were essential.

An hour had passed since his awakening and he was beginning to wonder when the obese deputy

fed his prisoners at his perforce boarding house. If the surmise taken from the half-filled bottle of "Four Star" had been freely partaken, Hardley might sleep late that morning and awaken with a "head" that would make his visit to the guard house a second thought.

Seymour thought of firing his pistol through the window in a hope of attracting attention to his plight; he even went so far as to unlimber the weapon. But he recalled that he had not the slightest idea of where the calaboose was situated, for it had not come to his notice in the course of his one crowded day in Gold. That it did not stand immediately back of the sheriff's office he was certain, and it might be on the camp's outskirts for all he knew to the contrary. It seemed the part of wisdom to reserve his ammunition; at least to give the deputy another half-hour of grace.

In his impatience to be out and going, the sergent began to pace the floor. Already, his physical fitness was asserting itself, returning him rapidly to normal. There was a pair of bumps on the back of his head where the two put-out blows had landed, but there was no sign of a scalp wound,

thanks to the protection the thick blanket had afforded. Except for the confining bars and that ice-box door, he was entirely able to be out, carrying the law where it sadly was needed.

On his fourth or fifth round of the small room, he paused before the door, seized with a commanding impulse to expend his surplus energy in beating upon it. He had seen prisoners behave in that same futile fashion in his own guard rooms and, for the sake of quiet, had put irons on them when they persisted. But there was no one in this inhospitable place to put irons on him, so he yielded to the extent of beating a tattoo on the stout planking.

To his amazement, the door gave slightly under his touch, which was no way at all for a self-respecting jail door to behave. This "giving" suggested the application of more force. Crouching, he put his shoulder to it and the heavy portal swung open. He had been "jugged" in an uncorked "jug," and there was nothing now to keep him from going where and when he listed.

He delayed just long enough to examine the fastenings which had not fastened. A heavy pad-

lock hung securely locked in its deep-set staple, but the hasp had been left outside, folded back against the door. For the first time that morning, Sergeant Scarlet smiled; more than that, he grinned. For once he was indebted to too much brandy.

Outside, under the blue sky, he took several deep breaths of vitalizing air. He had seen his own prisoners do that upon being released from confinement, but never understood the impulse as he did now. A moment was necessary to get his bearings; the jail stood on a knoll a hundred yards back from King Street.

To make tracks out of camp was his first inclination. But at once he rejected any attempt at escape. That would only start Hardley in pursuit, probably with that possé the coroner's jury had authorized so superfluously. Rather, he must quiet the deputy's suspicions, even to disclosing his official identity, if necessary. Picking his path, he strode down the incline to King Street.

As he neared the Bonanza, he saw Hardley come off the porch and waddle in his direction. But at first sight of him, the deputy merely added another to the morning's list of surprises. This one took

the form of a cheerfully waved greeting, as from friend to friend. By no stretch of the imagination could it have been expected from an officer sighting a prisoner who had just broken out of jail. Seymour advanced, puzzled and on guard.

"You're out early this morning, stranger," Hardley shrilled when the paces that separated them were few. "Just been up to your room looking for you but heard no 'Come in.'"

The sergeant studied the man a moment, then replied: "Sorry I was out. What can I do for you, now that you've found me?"

"I noticed yesterday that you have a come-hither eye," went on the deputy in a lower voice. "I've got a hunch them murdering stage robbers are camped in a cañon south of town a-ways. Thought you might like a little frolic as one of my official possé. No danger to speak of, for I'll be leading you and we'll all be armed to the shoulder-blades. Better come if you've got the time to spare."

That Hardley did not know Seymour had spent the night in jail seemed indubitable. The Mounted officer could not explain it. Too much to blame

upon the brandy this seemed, for the deputy had been absolutely sober in Brewster's room. But explanations could wait. Here was a chance to be about his police business without disclosing that he had any.

At once Seymour expressed his regret. He honestly had no time to spare. Hardley could understand how anxious he was to get to the creeks and locate something for himself. The deputy should have no trouble recruiting enough men, citizens who knew the country better than any stranger could and who already had staked their claims. He was for the law every time—Seymour was, but he'd appreciate being excused from service this once.

"Sure, I understand, friend," agreed the deputy. "Be on your way and the best of luck to you. My down-river hunch may be all wrong, so keep your eyes peeled for a horse that's shod in front and plain behind. The rider of him is the killer of Sergeant Seymour, or I'm a liar and as a deputy sheriff, not worth the powder to blow me to blazes!"

Half an hour later, a horse that was shod before and plain behind traveled north out of Gold. His rider was Sergeant Seymour himself, not his killer.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CLOSED CREEK

By noon, Seymour had his A-tent pitched on the bank of the Cheena, between the trail and the stream, a few rods below the point where Glacier Creek made its indigo-colored contribution. Above the scrubby timber spiralled the smoke of the hidden mission, to which the officer proposed to pay a neighborly call when he had finished the meal of bacon and beans which he was preparing.

Yesterday, O'Malley and his niece had made it plain that they wished a conference with him to be secret and under cover of night. His unexplained capture had made that impossible. Whether or not their caution was well founded, he was unwilling to await the fall of another night. He would need to make camp somewhere and felt it might better be near enough to excuse an open call. Hence he had pitched his tent here.

But Seymour had done more that morning than ride out from Gold five muddy miles and make

camp. His years of detachment service had made him something of a jack-of-all-trades, and his cayuse-packed outfit was comprehensive. Kaw, grazing on the lush grass of the meadow, now was as neatly shod as he could have been at the hands of any blacksmith. No longer was the animal a fit subject for Deputy Hardley's suspicions.

The sergeant had scoured his tin dishes in the river bank sand and was returning to the tent when he saw a horseman observing him from the main trail. The man stared a moment longer, then rode toward him. Soon, Seymour recognized him and wondered at such curiosity from a man of affairs.

"You're my first visitor, Brewster!" he called as the cordial freighter drew near. "Welcome to camp. If you'd been fifteen minutes earlier, I'd have fed you. Now, if you're hungry, over there's the grub box."

"So it's really you?" The visitor's response was oddly halting, as if he was finding it difficult to believe his eyes.

"To my best knowledge and belief, I'm no one else."

Brewster laughed and swung into a chatting po-

sition by hooking one leg over the horn of his saddle. "And here I was hot-footing into town to get you out of jail."

"Kind of you, but apparently unnecessary," Seymour offered a laugh of his own. "Where did you get the idea I was in limbo?"

The sergeant did not need to feign his look of mystification. That the news of an arrest that Hardley himself did not remember had traveled to the creeks to be heard by Brewster served only to deepen the puzzle.

"Did Hardley mention jail to you?" he asked. "He didn't to me, and I saw him just before I left town."

"It wasn't Hardley—haven't seen him since he left my room last evening. But Cato said Hardley had pinched you and locked you up. He declared he had helped in the capture and was pleased with himself."

At mention of Cato, the sergeant was suddenly in the clear, although not so much as an eyelash flicker betrayed the fact. He recalled now the inordinately long arms of the man. Doubtless these had puckered the blanket around his midriff and

beaten him into unconsciousness. The lovelorn old codger, fired with jealousy, must have been stalking the widow's place, mistaken him for a rival and acted under the dictates of his brandy-befuddled brain. That he had forgotten to confide the fact of imprisonment to Hardley was evident; but then, he had neglected to lock the jail. How the ox driver had got possession of the key was a detail unexplained, but Seymour would never be sufficiently curious about that to inquire into it. To have been taken single-handed by Cato was not particularly flattering, even though the gnome was possessed of superhuman strength.

"Wasn't Cato hitting the hootch yesterday?" was all he asked of the driver's employer.

"He was that," admitted Brewster, "and he had a hang-over this morning. But how he ever imagined—— Oh, well, there's no harm done, long as it was only a drunken dream. I was afraid Hardley would lose another day getting after the Seymour murderers and I didn't want to see you suffer from his foolishness. But you've picked a queer place to camp, strikes me. Didn't you know that Glacier Creek is closed?"

The sergeant had not heard this and was curious to know how any creek could be "closed." Brewster told him. The genial old missionary, Shan O'Malley, had laid the foundation for the situation in the early days of the rush. With more foresight than many laymen, he had seen what was coming. To hold the Indians of his congregation, or whatever he called it, and to keep them from contact with the white "rushers" as far as possible, he had induced them to claim, stake and register every foot of bar and bench from the cañon entrance back to the glacier. To make a close corporation of it, he and his niece Ruth had staked the two full claims between the cañon gate and the Cheena. Glacier Creek had not proved a bonanza, but O'Malley did not seem to care; the laziest Siwash could pan out a living, and the old man was keeping his flock together.

Then along came Bonnemort and Kluger, a shrewd pair from somewhere back in eastern Canada. They saw a chance of operating the Glacier Creek diggings on a large scale. The Bonnemort of the combination admitted to being a half-breed, and he knew how to handle the Siwashes. Before

the missionary knew what was up, the pair had leased every Indian claim beyond the cañon gate. Moreover—and Brewster was forced to smile appreciatively as he told it—they had hired the Indians to work their own claims. When all was set, they posted a “No Trespass” sign and stationed an armed guard at the narrow entrance. When this sentry turned back the sky-pilot intent on visiting his flock, the whole district had learned of the coup.

Brewster said he had been right friendly with Ruth Duperow and her uncle at that time. Because of their fears that the Siwashes were being robbed, he had brought Sam Hardley to investigate. The B. & K. outfit had produced their leases and the Indians denied that they were being worked against their will. As no established trail ran up the creek, which was a veritable cul-de-sac because of its glacier source, Hardley had decided that the leases were within their rights and that there wasn’t a thing to be done about it. The creek was still closed, and because there was only one entrance—through the narrow mouth of the cañon, where one man could hold up a regiment—it was likely to

remain so until the within-the-law operators took down the bars.

"I lost out with the sky-pilot and Miss Duperow because I wouldn't storm the gate," Brewster concluded regretfully. "About that time appeared this Sergeant Seymour, then under cover as a mining expert. He fell hard for the girl, which is not against him, for there isn't a finer in all B. C. than Miss Ruth. I don't know what he thought of the monopoly or what he intended to do when he got into uniform. As you know, the stage robbers killed him before he got saddled up."

"What do you make of it yourself?"

Brewster shrugged his broad shoulders. "I may be prejudiced. You see, while I lost my best girl, I landed my B. & K. packing contract. I'll say they pay their bills. Hope you won't think I was trying to horn into your game by criticizing your camp selection. But I thought you might not know how things stood on Glacier."

Seymour thanked him, then glanced into the river. "Maybe I like the looks of the Cheena," he added.

"Scouting for dredger people, eh?" Brewster

made shrewd surmise. "I hear they're cleaning up strong in the Klondike. The Cheena ought to pay rich for anyone with money enough to put in a hydraulic plant. Remember that Philip Brewster is in the freighter business in case you begin operations. Good luck to you and goodbye for the present."

The sergeant watched Brewster ride across the flat to the main trail; noted that he turned back toward the creeks. Evidently the freighter had been riding into Gold to effect, as he said, Seymour's release. An obliging individual, Brewster, even if he had given his fat deputy friend foolish advice about holding back the Mounted.

So Glacier was a closed creek. A guarded "gate" had been swung across its cañon mouth. Upon what? Upon Bart Caswell's something "richer than gold," he strongly suspected. Perhaps upon the "sergeant's" slayer as well. Seymour was part Irish; he enjoyed passing the impassable—or trying to.

CHAPTER XXII

A FIGURE OF SPEECH

CARRYING an empty tin pail from his mess outfit, to lend borrowing-color to his neighborly call, Seymour trudged openly to the mission. This proved to be a sizeable log structure without cross or belfry which served both as dwelling for the missionary and a place for the Indians to worship. It had been up several years, from the dead look of the logs. The outlook was upon Glacier Creek rather than upon the Cheena. A forest of scrubby cedar and fir skirted the back of it, while not far away was that misplaced rock spur which formed one flank of the closed cañon.

His coming was announced in chorus by several malamutes chained to individual dog houses in the front yard. The venerable sky-pilot himself was at the front door ready to admit him.

"You are welcome, brother—more than welcome," was his greeting. "Your arrival relieves

my daughter of the necessity of riding to Gold to assure us that nothing has happened to you."

"Your daughter—— I thought I'd met your niece! Circumstances beyond my control made last night's appointment——"

Seymour's excuses were interrupted by the sudden entry, from what seemed to be the kitchen, of Moira, a radiant surprise in a blue gingham apron below the hem of which showed her riding boots, testimony that she, not the blond Ruth, had been about to ride to his rescue.

"When——?" was all he was able to gasp as he reached out for both her hands.

"Last night's stage—— To think that you—— Oh! Ruth has told me all about how finely you've taken hold of the situation!"

"And Miss Ruth—where is she?" he asked.

"She's had a hard blow in the death of a man she had come to trust. Isn't it enough—glad enough that I'm here, Sergeant Scarlet? I know you must be hungry after that long ride from town. In a minute-and-a-half——"

Seymour reassured her, telling of the precaution he had taken to cover his visit by establishing

camp near by. He pointed to the bucket. "Anyone seeing me come here with this, surely must take me for a borrowing neighbor, don't you think? Already I've been spotted as a scout for a gold-dredging outfit with designs on the Cheena."

"Then, brother, if you'll pardon me, I'll hand you over to Moira," said the Missionary. "I'm engaged in a vital work—nothing less than the translation of the Epistles into Chinook. I try to leave all temporal affairs to my daughter and my niece for my time is short—my time is short. You will find her most competent and more fully informed in the details of this outrageous intrigue than I am myself. In this grievous time of turmoil which has befallen us, I thank the good Lord every hour for the return of such a daughter."

"Father, dear!" she gently hushed him.

While the girl was engaged in settling him at a table near a window and arranging his books and papers, Seymour glanced about the comfortable living room. Every stick of furniture, he perceived, was frontier made. The few wall decorations were Indian handiwork—rude carvings in wood, garishly painted; reed basketry of beautiful

design; a bow and arrows, canoe paddles. The floor coverings were skins that had never been in the hands of a professional taxidermist. There was an air of home about the place never to be found in the quarters of the longest established police detachments. In this instance, probably, it was the touch of Ruth, the grieving cousin, or of Moira herself before she had put into the Far North in behalf of her supposedly vagrant brother.

He crossed to the fireplace in which cedar logs were in a crackling blaze. Its rock was native galena in which the brownish stains of iron predominated, but so besprinkled was it with mineral facets as to look alive where the fire played upon it. On the mantel were a totem pole and several pieces of carved ivory but no trace of "Outside," not even a phonograph. Either Moira and Ruth were satisfied with existence in the wild or did not wish to be reminded of civilization.

When Moira rejoined him after having settled her father at his self-assigned task, Seymour was fingering idly several specimens of heavy, grayish mineral which lay at the end of the mantel.

"Frog-gold, my father calls that stuff," said the

girl. "It's the plague of our Glacier Creek placers, cluttering up our sluices and utterly worthless except in rare instances, such as——"

She ran her eyes over the specimens and picked out one that was shaped curiously like a human hand. In the gray palm was a small nugget of gold, worth possibly a dollar.

"Take this one as a souvenir of your first visit to the mission," she said, and held it out to him.

He had been on the point of asking her for one of the curios, because of a possible connection with the case that had occurred to him, so accepted the gift gladly.

"Do you know the real story of the closing of Glacier Creek, Moira?" he asked, the matter-in-hand always on his mind.

"I heard it all last night from father and from Ruth," she assured him. "This pretended Mountie who has just been murdered made an inspection of the creek in father's behalf because of his love for my cousin. It's a trouble creek, I tell you.

"This Bart Caswell made friends with a hired gunman that Bonnemort and Kluger had on guard and slipped into the gulch where the claims are lo-

cated. He showed great skill in keeping under cover and was not discovered until the next afternoon, by which time he had seen more than enough.

"His report," Moira went on, "was worse than father had feared. The conscienceless scoundrels had made slaves of all our people, plying them with liquor and working them heartrending hours under the whip. Bart thought the slavers knew their days of oppression were numbered, and were trying to strip the claims of their treasure in the shortest possible time. Undoubtedly the guard at the gate was as much to keep the slaves in as the whites out. Isn't that an intolerable state of affairs? Do you wonder that father is beside himself with anxiety, realizing his impotence until Canada wakes up to what is going on?"

There was no doubting her honest rage, or that it was unselfish, as neither her cousin's claim nor her father's was being plundered.

"Did I understand you to say that Bart was discovered up the gulch?" Seymour asked.

"Bonnemort himself discovered him slipping through the brush near one of their long sluice boxes," Moira informed him. "He would have

beaten Bart to death had not his partner happened along. Kluger, who evidently is the brains of the combination, didn't want a white man murdered 'on the works,' as he put it. They brought Bart to the gate and literally kicked him into the open, warning him that he'd have no second chance. If ever they caught him trying to spy on them again, they threatened to shoot him on sight."

Seymour recalled the widow's version, undoubtedly the true one concerning Bart's motives and mental processes regarding the Glacier Creek plunderers. "Until that uniform fell into his hands, he did not see any way of getting the best of them," Mrs. Caswell had told him.

Bart's plan from that point was easily deduced. Once in uniform, it had been necessary for him to "stall" in regard to the Tabor murder—to check-mate Hardley with any citizens' investigation by pretending to make his own. He seemed to have found time, too, for a reassuring visit with Ruth Duperow and perhaps to advance whatever personal game he was playing with the girl.

Yesterday morning the imposter had set out for the guarded cañon on Glacier Creek, counting on

the magic of the Mounted uniform, which, for once, had failed to cast its wonted spell. Possibly this failure was because the plunderers had recognized the counterfeit. But the sergeant was not ready to credit that explanation. He preferred to think that it pointed to the desperation of the gold strippers, who would not hesitate to add the murder of a non-commissioned officer to their other crimes.

The sergeant was forced to admit to himself the neatness of Bart's scheme as he now surmised it. Had the uniform "worked," the fake sergeant would have taken the B. & K. clean-up, ostensibly to hold it until the courts adjudicated the Indians' claims. Once the treasure was in his possession, he would have made off with it over the conveniently near Alaskan border and escaped with it on some southbound steamer that touched at no British Columbian port. Just possibly, because of that gift of tongue with women of which Seymour already had seen evidence, Bart would have persuaded Ruth Duperow to accompany him.

"I'll give the Glacier diggings a look-over," he

said with a decision that was not as sudden as it sounded, and got to his feet.

Seymour's expression showed as little concern as though he proposed going to the door to glance at the weather prospects. He was not underrating the risks that would come with an attempt to work from the inside out; but he was ignoring them so far as any surface indication was concerned. From the scout he was determined to make, he had every hope of getting the needed direct evidence; at least, he would determine what was "richer than gold" that had led Bart Caswell to tempt fate once too often.

"You'll never get past the gate!" Moira cried in despair and possibly some disappointment that he had taken her own arrival so placidly. "Bonne-mort himself has taken charge of the guard there. He was there yesterday morning and yelled to Ruth: 'Tell your friend a uniform makes a fine target!' It was that renewed threat that sent her toward town with her too-late warning. This morning, since you had been delayed, I went over to the creek. He was there, but kept silent—even

when I called him a murderer. I tell you, Sergeant Scarlet, darling, the cañon is closed!"

Seymour smiled his appreciation of the care she was showing in his behalf. So she had dared call Bonnemort a murderer to his face! The wonder was she hadn't drawn a bullet for herself instead of silence.

"I'm figuring on coming *out* through the cañon, Moira dear—sort of unlatching the gate from the inside. There must be another way in." Seymour's tone was confident, although the other way of which he spoke was yet to be found.

"There *is* another way in!"

This welcome declaration boomed upon their ears from the old missionary at his desk under the window. Evidently he had not been so absorbed in his Biblical translation as they had thought him. Now he pushed back his chair and crossed to the fireplace.

"I discovered this other way while exploring the spur last spring, just before this curse of gold fell upon us," he explained. "Had I known what Bart was up to, I'd have shown him this secret way. I did not actually enter the gulch by it, not trusting

muscles that are getting ragged with age, but you can, brother, if your head is level, your fingers and toes strong."

"Score one for the sky-pilot of Argonaut!" cried his daughter, throwing her arms around his neck and patting him on the back. "Since they've smitten us on every cheek we possess, it's high time we smote them back."

In planning for the hazardous attempt immediately, Moira O'Malley's insistence on going along proved a complication. Before the sergeant realized her trend, he had admitted knowing only a smattering of Chinook. The girl, it seemed, spoke the tongue of the provincial Indians fluently.

"These Siwashes are by no means as dumb as they look," she said. "They will know who left the diggings on this murder ride yesterday morning. They'll tell me and then you'll know the man you're after."

Seymour at once rejected her offer as rash beyond reason. Her father, however, seemed passive, perhaps silenced by his admiration for her courage.

"Why, I'll be safe enough with such an officer as you to protect me," Moira declared. "Think what you've already done for me!"

But her trustfulness did not appeal in this extremity. Seymour insisted that such a piece of scouting was no work for a woman. She might cross-examine her Siwashes after he had cleared the creek of whites, but not before. In the end, therefore, there was a compromise, to the extent that Moira should come as far as the edge of the gulch—to see that her father got home safely.

The sergeant departed from the mission openly, carrying his tin pail. He even hoped that the house was, as the girl feared, being watched through a glass from the cañon's mouth. At his camp, he made hurried preparations, pocketing a supply of "hard" rations and extra cartridges for his gun. Down in the meadow, he unpicketed both horses. They could be trusted to stay near the tent and, in case his return was delayed, they must not suffer from want of grass and water. Although the Rev. O'Malley had said nothing about need of a rope for his "other way in," Seymour quickly spliced the two picket strings and coiled the length over

his shoulder. Gaining cover of the timber, he made his way as rapidly as possible to the rear of the mission house where the O'Malleys awaited him.

The spur proved a hard climb and the missionary needed help over several of the rougher places. But at length he brought them to a point where the sheer wall of the boxed-in gulch was many feet lower than the remainder.

Even there, a dizzy drop intervened between the top and a narrow ledge that promised a path to timber line for one who was certain of foot. The old man pointed out certain crevices and projections by which a daring climber might work his way down to the ledge; but the sergeant was glad he had brought his rope with which to simplify the start.

The risk that anyone would catch sight of him as he lowered himself seemed slim, for the creek at this point was some distance away and a thick growth of fir lay between. At any rate, this was a risk to be taken; he must negotiate that ledge in daylight.

"You'll come out at the Indian burying ground,"

said the missionary. "I'm sure it lies in front of this dip in the wall. Conceal yourself there for the night. The Siwashes will be anywhere else after darkness falls."

With this sage advice, the veteran missionary started back over the trail, his mind already speeding to other matters now that he had done all he might in the one at hand.

For just a moment the lovers who had been through so many trying experiences enjoyed their first interval alone since the Montreal parting. This was more mental than physical in view of the stress of the situation.

"You've explained to Ruth?" Seymour asked presently.

"In part—that you're the real Russell Seymour. She still thinks that this Bart was an officer but using your name for some official reason. I haven't told father about Oliver yet, and—should I tell him?"

As often, Seymour's expression was an enigma to her.

"Not yet," he said finally. "It just may take some of the sting away if you can present him with

a son-in-law in partial place of his first-born who cannot be returned."

"You think, Russell—oh, do you think you are on the track——"

"I'll get him—Karmack—somewhere," he assured her.

Having knotted his rope at fifteen-inch intervals, the sergeant made one end fast to a sturdy young cedar which grew near the edge and cast the loose end into the cañon. As nearly as he could determine by peering over, the hemp reached almost, if not quite, to the ledge.

"How soon shall we look for your return?" Moira asked a bit hysterically when all was ready.

"When I come out through the cañon gate." He hoped his laugh was reassuring.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN MORNING CAME

THE rope proved long enough but there was no overhang. And the ledge was a path down the face of the cliff, but so fragmentary that many times the hold of his fingers forced into crevices alone made it passable. At the very start, an apparently solid piece broke off under his weight and almost cast him into the depths. After that lesson, which came so near to being his last, he sidled along the wall so that his toes might set as near the face of it as possible.

Fifty feet from the bottom of the gulch the ledge ended. He was forced to stake all on a hazardous leap into the top of the nearest fir tree. While the upper branches gave under his hundred and eighty pounds and countless needles pricked him, his fall was broken and eventually stayed by the stouter limbs below.

In the gathering dusk he gained the burial

ground of which O'Malley had spoken. Familiar as he was with the native customs of the Northland, he felt thankful, when this settlement of the dead loomed up in the gloom, that he had been prepared for the spectral effect. Built on stilts above each grave were huts of bizarre woodwork. In each, he knew, were housed the particular personal treasures of some departed brave, but nothing of intrinsic worth.

Seymour was not superstitious and, much as he might have preferred other habitation for the night, he did not hesitate to borrow a lodging here. Selecting the most commodious of the "hatches," he climbed under its roof. Although this particular 8 x 10 hoot-box boasted both a spire and a dome it was open on one side, presumably for the purpose of exhibiting a black bottle, an alarm clock from which the works had been removed, and other heirlooms of some Siwash gone to happier hunting grounds. It offered a measure of protection, however, against the chill that came with darkness. As he had no blanket and dared not light a fire, this "spook roost," as he thought of it, was more than welcome.

A short distance up the creek from his refuge and on the opposite bank lay an Indian camp of four or five families, to judge by the number of supper fires. He watched the natives through their meal, the while munching a tasteless emergency ration that was guaranteed to be rich in calories.

The Indian camp proved unusually quiet. He had heard Eskimo hunting parties make far more of a powwow around their night fires of blubber. There was no ribald song or laughter, no fighting, which were to be expected if the despoilers were supplying the natives with liquor, as Moira had told the sergeant.

The yelping of many hungry dogs warned him of the folly of trying to scout the camp under cover of darkness. He decided to stay where he was and to begin his explorations in the morning when work was under way. Gradually, with the fires, the noise of the camp died out, as if the sleeping mats were superattractive to the natives after a hard day's work on the placers.

Politics made strange bedfellows, Seymour had heard. Well, he stood ready to testify that police duty in the Argonaut Valley brought one to strange

beds, too. His first night in a jail bunk; his second in a Siwash mausoleum! And on both occasions, nothing softer than his hat for a pillow!

But the murmur of the rushing creek and the sougling of the firs invited sleep; he yielded to the lullaby.

A crash like thunder awoke him at one time in the night, but he found the sky clear on looking out. Not until a second report came could he locate the source—the glacier in which the creek had its source. The green monster was sloughing off its ice. There came variations in the alarm whenever new crevasses were split with a terrific, smashing noise.

The worst start of the night, however, came in a sense of falling and landing with a thump that shook every bone in his body. That he had fallen and landed, not dreamed the sensations, became clear when he found himself on the ground and looking up at the hut. He had rolled out of “bed.”

Seymour was up the next morning with the *klootchmen*, and they arose with the sun. Before the Indian camp was thoroughly awake, he had

slipped out of the burying ground and gained the cover of the timber fringe along the south wall of the gulch.

From what he could see now of the formation, he determined that Glacier Creek was not as inaccessible as reputed. There were other possible entrances, at least one of which appeared less hazardous than that by which he had come. In the past, the natural entrance to the cañon had always been open and no one had ever found it necessary to work out another.

Refreshing himself at a spring upon which he had stumbled, he turned first to an investigation of the cañon a quarter of a mile below. So nearly did the wings of the rocky spur meet that there was scarcely a hundred feet between walls at the narrowest point. Through this gap, Glacier Creek poured without hindrance. Along the opposite wall ran a wagon-width trail.

At a point about halfway through the cañon stood two tents, the canvas of which still was white. Doubtless this was the camp of the guards and, perhaps, that of the promoters of the steal. Just now he was satisfied with placing this camp;

close investigation could wait until he learned what "richer than gold" was being gleaned up the gulch.

Slowly he worked up the stream, keeping back from the bank and well screened by the brush. Breakfast was over at the camp near which he had spent the night. Twenty Indians, men and women, were at work picking and shoveling in a near-by bench and wheeling loaded barrows to a long wooden sluice box into which a small stream of water had been diverted. The onlooker was puzzled that they were working with such seeming good-will. In fact, he had never seen natives so industrious. Nowhere was any whip-armed master visible.

A blast from upstream did not concern him greatly, as he thought the glacier was cutting daylight capers. But when other reverberations crashed out at regular intervals, he felt certain that dynamite was being exploded. This would explain why the Siwashes were able to work so freely in the frozen gravel and gave color to Bart's report that the claims were being "stripped."

Exercising the utmost caution, he worked his

way eastward until he crouched opposite an exaggerated "ant hill" of activity, undoubtedly the scene of major operations. There were three sluices here, near a bench that had been shattered by a recent explosion. No crew of white miners could have shown greater industry or fewer lost motions than the natives at work there. And as below, he saw no sign of a white oppressor.

Then, from a tent near the Indian encampment, there emerged a brawny man who answered the O'Malleys' description of Bonnemort, he who nearly had done for Bart. Six feet two or three and built from the soles up, he stood looking over the busy scene.

In a flash, Seymour recognized the red-headed man who had insisted on sending wine to the young Mounties in that Montreal cabaret. Something of a change of scene, this; but not so surprising in Canada—land of far-flung opportunities.

The sergeant surmised this to be the alleged breed's first appearance of the morning. Confirmation came with the appearance of a young squaw bearing a tray of breakfast which she spread on a rough table before the tent. Indeed, this

breed must have a "way" with the Siwashes, thought the sergeant, to command from them such competent service. From his reserved seat in the brush, he envied him the cup of steaming coffee and, later, the cigar which the autocrat of the wild lighted. This last was particularly tantalizing to one whose pipe must perforce remain cold.

Presently came a small man on horseback, all-white, puttee-clad, and, on reasonable supposition, one Kluger by name. Dismounted, the new arrival, reputed to be the "brains of the outfit," did not come to his partner's shoulder; but from the rapidity of his movements, Seymour judged that his small frame concealed a dynamo of energy. The two conferred a moment, then started toward the sluice box.

Peering from behind the bushes, Seymour felt as though he were watching some well-lighted motion picture. He saw Bonnemort call a couple of Siwashes to them; but no word of their conversations reached him.

For an hour he watched them as they directed the morning clean-up of the treasure gathered on

the riffles—cross cleats of wood on the bottom of the sluice troughs—from the pay dirt washed the previous day. One departure from the regular placer practice stood out. The gleaners carried two sacks, one twice the size of the other. At every riffle, contributions were made to each.

If this was a division of the yield between the managing sharpers and working owners, it seemed unnecessarily clumsy. Why did it need to be done on the dump in such piecemeal fashion? Both parties to the proceeding seemed satisfied, however. There was no haggling, not even discussion over the division, if such it really was.

In the end, the two whites, between them, carried the larger and heavier sack to Bonnemort's tent, while the two Indians who had made the cleaning carried off the smaller bag to one of their wickiups.

After spending several minutes within the tent, behind closed flaps, the partners came out and started down-stream, Bonnemort walking with long strides beside the mounted Kluger. To the sergeant, the supposition seemed reasonable that they were bound for a clean-up at the lower diggings and that, for a time, the upper creek would be

free of whites. He decided upon a bold stroke, the success of which would depend upon how far the Siwashes had been taken into confidence.

Going down the creek bank in the brush until he was out of sight of the camp, he gained the trail and started back. He walked as openly as though he belonged to the outfit; stopped at several points to look critically at the work being done, then strode on with a nod or grunt of approval. None challenged his advance; not even a look questioned him. He entered the tent as though he had every right to do so, as, indeed, he had, although it was a right of a different sort than any who observed him might have imagined.

As the canvas flaps fell behind him, he made a rapid survey of the interior—two folding cots with bedding, camp stools, a table built of empty dynamite boxes with the labels of the “Kingdom Come” brand much in evidence, and an improvised clothes horse hung with an assortment of masculine apparel. His particular interest settled on what looked like a carpenter’s tool chest, but which, for want of any likelier container, he took to be the

camp's treasury box. Without much hope, he stooped and tried the lid. It was locked.

In the act of kneeling to examine this, the tent was suffused in sunlight from the opening of a flap. He straightened and turned as a young squaw entered, her head bound in a bright-colored bandanna. Possibly she was the fastidious Bonnemort's chambermaid, he thought, come to make the bed. His heart was pounding. An alarm would ruin all.

"*Kla-how-yah!*" she grunted the usual Chinook greeting, but evinced no surprise at finding him in the tent.

"Don't mind me," he managed to reply with a well assumed assurance, hoping she at least could understand English, even though she did not speak it.

But she spoke it, and to his utter consternation. "Right good make-up if it fools a Mountie," she said with a lilting laugh that was controlled not to carry beyond the canvas. "How do you like me as a *klootch?*"

"Moir!" he whispered.

"None other, Sergeant Scarlet."

CHAPTER XXIV

TENT-TOLD TALES

SEYMOUR stood and stared at the young woman, marveling at her complete transformation. A right good make-up, she had called it. He could truthfully make the statement stronger. When her eyes were hidden and her voice stilled, all trace of his beloved was gone. She looked as Siwash as though she had been born on the trail of a squaw mother and had passed her babyhood strapped to a board.

The fine lines of her slim young figure were swathed in rags after the fashion of the North Coast native women. Waist line was nil, her makeshift skirt seemed to drop from her shoulders. For a one-piece garment, it certainly was of pieces, patched and pinned and tied together. He doubted if she could step out of it without taking it apart.

To her complexion she had done something to

give it a rich copper tinge. The hands were stained to match. Her lips had been thickened with paint lines and over her patrician nose ran a series of blue lines, a counterfeit of the tattooing with which the Argonaut native women disfigure themselves. A finger tied up in a soiled rag added the last touch of verisimilitude.

Recovering from his first shock, Seymour reminded himself of their situation. "Didn't I make it plain yesterday that your coming here was beyond all reason?" he demanded almost petulantly.

"Not so far beyond as myself," she murmured rebelliously. "I'm here, am I not? And you'll find me more reasonable for having had my own way."

She intended following him from the first, she admitted, and for that reason she had watched his descent from the top of the cliff, marking the difficulties he had overcome. After helping her father back to the mission, she had given her evening to make-up and costume. She left home before daybreak.

"Do you mean to say you tip-toed that ledge

and made the jump into the fir tree?" he asked incredulously.

She shook her head, flashing him a smile. "I profited by watching you. I came all the way down by rope, bringing an extra coil, ready knotted, from the mission and tying it to the end of yours."

"But you won't be able to fool the squaws!" he observed, again looking troubled.

"Haven't tried. They think I slipped in to see how they are faring and toggged out as one of them that the whites would not suspect my visit. They seem pleased—perhaps flattered—and will keep my secret."

Seymour did not relish the situation created by her persistence. The girl's presence was a grave complication. It handicapped him just when his investigation was advancing with unexpected smoothness. But now that she was in, his duty was to get her out safely.

"And how are your Indian wards faring?" he asked, by way of gaining time to figure out the safest, most expeditious exit for her.

"They puzzle me for they have no complaint,"

she answered. "Either conditions have changed or that imposter was sadly misled in his observations. Actually, the Indians seem to look upon Bonnemort and Kluger as benefactors. '*Hiyu skookum* Boston men,' they call the rascals."

"B. & K. are taking the bulk of the clean-up," Seymour told her. "I watched the divvy when they stripped the sluices out front this morning."

"But that doesn't seem possible," Moira protested. "I hear from two of my most trusted *klootchmen* that the Indians are given *all* the gold."

Seymour seemed not to have heard. He was crossing to the front of the wall tent where, beneath the table, he had sighted a sack exactly like the treasure-weighted one he had seen the partners carry from the creek. But if this was the same, it had been emptied.

"All the gold, I said," repeated the girl, impatient at his seeming lack of attention to her astonishing report. "What do you make of that, Sergeant Scarlet?"

"I'll say that is right kind and unbelievably generous of B. & K. and that a right lively sur-

prise is awaiting my Irisher when I get her out of jeopardy."

The sergeant had upturned the sack and was shaking it. A single jagged lump, evidently held in the fabric when the sack had been dumped, thudded to the ground. Both leaned over to examine it. The girl straightened first.

"More of that old frog-gold," she said with another low, aggravating laugh.

Seymour picked up the specimen. It was of the same grayish, metallic substance as the hand-shaped piece which Moira had given him at the mission. This one, however, held no yellow offering.

"Richer than gold!" In thought, Seymour murmured Bart's exclamation of promise to Mrs. Caswell.

He believed that at last he knew the answer to one part of the Glacier Creek riddle. But he said nothing to the girl about his hopes as he pocketed the fragment.

"You said the Siwashes would tell you which of the two men rode away from the gulch, the

morning of the murder," he reminded her. "Did they?"

"That's another peculiar thing," she replied, lines of perplexity wrinkling her stained brow. "My *klootchmen* friends insist that both Kluger and Bonnemort were here as usual all that morning. They made *hiyu* clean-up—gathered much gold—that Thursday morning and are positive they are not mistaken about the kind white men. The Indians haven't heard that Bart was murdered; they still are chuckling at the way he was run out of the gulch."

"That would seem to leave us cold—as cold as we are on the trail of that scoundrel Karmack, wouldn't it?"

Not a flicker did the girl show to indicate that she had hope of hearing something in that particular get-your-man direction.

But within the tent Seymour saw something else to convince him that the search for Bart's slayer was exceedingly "warm." In the presence of this second inanimate witness, he was more anxious than ever to get the girl safely out of the gulch—before the fireworks.

"I'm nearly through in here," he went on. "Have you planned how you will get yourself out?"

"I can go back the way I came, I suppose," she answered with a pout that was not as effective as it would have been had she been naturally clad. "But I thought you were going to open the cañon gate—from the inside out?"

"Even so, I can't have you within range when I—when I pick the lock."

"You mean—you mean there may be some shooting?" she demanded with suppressed excitement.

He did not like the gleam of hope that seemed to shine in her eyes. "You've done your part, Moira—more than any other woman would have dared to do. I wonder if I can trust you to wait for me in that graveyard down the creek?"

"To sit and idly wait when I might have a hand in the excitement!" she moaned. "Being a woman is an awful handicap, Sergeant Scarlet."

"That will be the helping part in this crime clean-up," he assured her, "to sit and wait. And if I do not come for you, you are to make your

own way back to the mission and wait some more until other Mounties arrive to settle the score. You've done enough; leave the rest to me."

Moira protested that she had accomplished nothing but the ruin of their theories. Couldn't she do something constructive?

"We are done with theories and it's time I demonstrate some facts," said the sergeant in a convincing tone. "I feel certain I can promise you the arrest of Bart's slayer if you'll go at once to the hide-out I suggested."

"But the *klootchmen* said——"

"Squaw talk—forget it." He was growing impatient. "Likely they don't know one day from another. Any moment Bonnemort may return. Don't risk his seeing you. Please go while there is time!" He turned to the tent front and held back one of its flaps.

"Moira unwelcome—a new sensation!" she murmured disappointedly, then shuffled out of the tent with the flat-footed walk of an Argonaut squaw.

The sergeant watched her a moment. How brave, how resourceful she was! Then he turned

and focused his gaze on an overturned boot that lay near the improvised clothes horse.

This was a right boot, according to the sole of it. Staring at him from the outer edge of that sole was a peculiar plate, presumably to counteract the wear of some foot lameness or a peculiarity of gait. As plainly as if it had been articulate, this told him: "The man who wears me killed Bart Caswell!"

CHAPTER XXV

CLUTCH OF THE BREED

MAKING her way down Glacier Creek, giving no attention to the working Siwashes and receiving none from them, Moira O'Malley wondered what discovery this enigma of the Mounted had held back from her. She did not resent particularly his lack of confidence, feeling that she had not earned it. That he seemed to disbelieve what the *klootch-men* had told her of the continued presence of the white and near-white spoilers at once troubled and gratified her. She hated to think that the Indian women would mislead her; but she did want the slayer of her cousin's sweetheart captured and punished. Hope of that seemed built on the Thursday morning absence of either Kluger or his partner.

At the start of this requested exit, the girl did not hurry, but ambled along squaw fashion. Once across the creek and out of sight of the upper dig-

gings, she meant to take to the brush. The Glacier natives would see her no more until Seymour came for her. That he would come for her—that he would be able to come for her, she did not doubt. From the moment she had seen him stride into the tent of Bonnemort as if he owned it, she had felt certain of his ultimate success.

She reached the creek and was about to climb to the foot log when she heard some one start across it from the other side. Raising the eyes which she had held downcast throughout the walk from the tent, she saw, with a tremor of alarm, that Bonnemort had beaten her to the improvised bridge. She sidled away from the log's end and seemed intent on watching the stream. Of course, the up-risen breed would be above noticing a squaw drudge, but she preferred to take no unnecessary chances.

With eyes steadily averted, she waited. The heavy steps drew nearer as the big man set his feet on the flattened surface. Then suddenly, they ceased. He had halted at the end of the log.

“Look up here, you *klootch!*”

The tone was that of a request, but it brought to

the girl a sudden chill of terror. She dared not look up, yet scarcely dared she refuse.

Evidently patience with a squaw was not held a virtue by the master. "Sulky, eh?" he grumbled and sprang down from the log to stand directly in front of her. Reaching out, he took her chin between thumb and forefinger and tilted it until her stained face looked up into his.

"A new one, ain't you?" he asked. "Thought I hadn't seen you before, princess."

A look came into his dark eyes that frightened her more. Not daring to utter protest for fear her Chinook would betray her, she cuffed at the hand which held her and broke his hold. Bonnemort's chuckle sounded more ominous to her than an imprecation.

"A Siwash *klootch* with spirit—and a beauty to boot!" he exclaimed. "There is something new under the sun. Your light's been hidden long enough, young wildcat. Take a stroll up to my tent and we'll talk it over."

His huge hand closed upon her shoulder with a firm grasp, but without undue violence. When he started back to camp, she stepped, perforce, at

his side. Although tall for a woman, the red-haired breed was head and shoulders above her, and she recognized a captor that could only be circumvented by guile.

He tried her out with several impertinent questions. Was she married? What would she take for a kiss? Did she like white men, the big bear kind?

He seemed to disown the Indian blood that was reputed to flow in his veins. Evidently he spoke little Chinook, for he complained at her refusal to understand English.

As they strolled slowly along, Moira wasted no thought on self-censure. Seymour had been right—her exploit was absolutely wild. Escape she must, but if humanly possible by her own wit, without involving the Mountie or even disturbing him in his investigation. A plan flashed into her mind and she hastened to perfect it.

With just the reluctance she thought her rôle required, she accompanied him to the placers. The Siwash men who looked up from their mining grinned at her or turned stolidly away. It was nothing to them that this *skookum* Boston chief

saw fit to pay attention to one of their women. No hope of help lay in that quarter.

When she reached that section of the placer where the two squaws to whom she had disclosed herself earlier in the morning were working a sluice, she began to struggle, hoping they would come to her rescue without disclosing her identity. But with her first jerk, Bonnemort's fingers tightened like a vise, as though he had been expecting some such move. She continued to struggle.

Fear that Seymour had gone into ambush within the tent and would come to her aid, to the upsetting of all his plans, kept her from crying out for help. One of the squaws did throw down her shovel and start toward her, but the other called her back. They whispered a moment, then turned their backs and resumed their toil.

Even the realization that her Indian friends, hardened by the sorcery of too much gold, had failed her, did not lift her voice. At the head of the creek, she glimpsed the glacier imbedded in the mountainside like a gigantic prism, its innumerable facets reflecting the sunlight in all the

colors of the rainbow. On either side lay a fringe of brush and timber. All these invited her, offering sanctuary from a fate that promised to be worse than death. But first, before she could flee to the hope of escape they held out, she must break the clutch of Bonnemort, the half-breed.

As she twisted and squirmed, her nails marked his face with furrowing scratches; but the smart of these seemed only to inflame him the more. As penalty, he demanded a kiss then and there where all her tribe could see. In the struggle to enforce his low-voiced decree, the bandanna that bound Moira's head fell to the ground. Her marvelous hair was revealed.

Both hands seized her and held her off, as helpless in his clutch as though she had been a child. For a moment his eyes enjoyed the oddly masked beauty of her. But soon, with comprehension, there entered a new light—that of recognition.

“So!” he muttered, baring his teeth as an angry beast bares its fangs. Transferring his hold to her streaming hair, Bonnemort flung the girl from her feet and started to drag her toward the tent.

At last, all other hope gone, Moira O'Malley screamed for help—the help of her Mountie. The green old glacier broadcasted her distress, reverberating her shrieks until the gulch rang with them.

Within Bonnemort's tent "Scarlet" Seymour knelt before a chest, the lock of which he had just succeeded in breaking. He was staring with dilated eyes upon the real wealth of the Glacier Creek placers—truly richer than gold.

As he reached out his fingers to run them through the heaping gray wealth, a scream sounded. It might have been the cry of a buzzard soaring in the blue above the camp.

But the next moment the shriek took definite form as a human's cry for help. Then came the shrill of his name—a long-drawn "Russell!"

In a flash he comprehended. Moira had been discovered and had fallen into the hands of the despoilers. Without closing the lid of the treasure chest, he sprang to his feet and lunged out of the tent. A hundred yards down the path, he saw the breed and the girl in desperate struggle.

Toward the scene of the unequal combat hastened a score of Argonaut natives.

Seymour charged down the incline. "Coming, Moira!" he shouted.

The breed heard and flung his intended victim from him to the rocks. One glance at the oncoming figure enlightened him. "Wolves run in pairs!" he exclaimed. "And die together!"

Moira saw him draw a revolver. Had he fired from the hip, her opportunity never would have come. But Bonnemort, confident in the distance that still separated him from the unknown rescuer, paused to take aim. The girl's fingers had closed around a rock. With all her might she hurled it at his head.

Her aim was poor, but its faultiness proved fortunate. The missile struck Bonnemort's wrist as his finger pressed the trigger. The bullet went wild. The gun was knocked from his hand and was thrown, by some muscular freak, within Moira's reach.

For a second, Bonnemort stood nursing his injured wrist; then, with a snarled curse, he sprang to recover his weapon. But Seymour, at the end

of his rush, crowded him off; the girl seized the gun and scrambled to her feet.

She could not understand why the sergeant did not draw and declare himself. As the enemy already had fired, he was no longer under restraint of that Quixotic slogan.

Bonnemort, too, looked puzzled, but evidently took heart from his foe's restraint, for he advanced threateningly. Fearing that Seymour would be no match in a rough-and-tumble, Moira tried to press the miner's gun upon him, but the sergeant waved her back.

"Hold off the Siwashes," he demanded. "This brute has a beating coming to him."

Bonnemort advanced with a chortle of joy, delighted that luck favored him with the respite of physical combat. So many things could happen in a battle of fists. The man-to-man struggle was on.

After his initial rush, which the sergeant cleverly side-stepped, the breed's main idea seemed to be to throw his powerful arms about his opponent. Except for occasional swings, which would have knocked Seymour out had they found

their mark, his efforts were directed to this end.

The sergeant had his Armistice detail to thank for his ability to evade. The Eskimo of the Arctic foreshore is above average height, large muscled and trained by occasional necessity to battle with Polar bears. When boxing matches were put on at the detachment, in lieu of other diversion, Seymour had acted as instructor. His greatest difficulty had been to break his pupils of "hugging" and to teach them that a punch was more effective than a clinch any day or where. As a result, he was not only trained to the minute, but highly practiced in slipping out of clinches.

From the first, Bonnemort fought like the Eskimo, trying again and again for a crushing embrace. With each vain effort, Seymour exacted punishment with jabs and cuts to the face. Never was he caught by the other's powerful arms.

For the alleged half-breed, the contest was soon sanguinary. His eyes and lips suffered and his nose became grotesque. On the other hand, Seymour was practically unmarked except for a lump on his forehead and a splotch on his

cheek where Bonnemort's fist had touched him.

Klootchmen and braves had come from all parts of the diggings and stood in an irregular circle, staring in open-eyed wonder at the battle. Moira was having an easy task keeping them back, although she still held the gun ready. No partisan spirit developed. If anything, their grunts at clinches evaded and blows sent home favored the strange, more compact fighter. The sergeant was unknown to them, but the fact that the mission girl sponsored him with gun point was enough for them.

Bonnemort's wind was first to fail him and for an untimed round or two, Seymour played for him with hard punches to the body at every opportunity. It became clear that the spoiler's bulk was more "beef" than muscle. He was becoming a spectacle. His rushes lost their force; his swings grew hopelessly wild; his guard, never effective, broke down entirely.

"Punishment enough for manhandling you?" Seymour asked Moira, as the whirligig of battle brought him facing her.

"Yes—yes, he's paid!" she cried.

The sergeant waded in then, regardless of the embrace he no longer feared. He beat Bonnemort to his knees. No *coup de grâce* was necessary, as the overgrown miner was blubbering for mercy. The Siwash gallery was beginning to grumble that none was delivered when they saw the victor produce a pair of handcuffs and snap them on the defeated one's wrists. Bonnemort seemed too dazed to notice the official trend in the situation, until—

“I arrest you, Harry Karmack, in the name of the King for the murder of Oliver O'Malley, at Armistice, Northwest Territories.”

Stunned by the surprise of his capture, turned white by the shock of the unexpected charge, the former factor stared about him wildly.

As for Moira O'Malley, the double surprise was almost too much. Fright had prevented her recognition of the familiar features of her Northern suitor now that his hair was turned to red; and all through the hunt, no hint had come to her from the close-lipped sleuth of the open places that the man he had sworn to “get” had raised his hand against her brother.

CHAPTER XXVI

BOOT AND BOOTY

“You’d best behave, Karmack.” Seymour accented the name of surprise that the girl might become convinced that their hunt was really done. “Your dyed pate don’t fool me and I’m no longer bound by our slogan of ‘never fire first.’ You took a couple of first shots up in the Arctic, remember, and have just tried another here. One false move and you get yours.”

Karmack stood very still. “What do you mean by that murder talk, Seymour?” he asked after a moment in which, evidently, he realized the folly of further denial of identity. “I may have squeezed a little from the grasping old Arctic to give me a start in British Columbia, but I swear I had nothing to do with the strangling of young O’Malley.”

Moirá still seemed puzzled. “I thought— Didn’t the jury say that Avic, the Eskimo—” She could not finish for emotion.

"It takes two men to use the Ugiuk-line effectively," Seymour explained to the girl. "I know, for I've had one around my own neck and barely broke out of the clutch. This fiend hired Avic to help him put your brother away—hired him with promise of a trip Outside to be tried for murder. Can you imagine! Now it will be ex-Factor Karmack who takes the trip—Inside."

Karmack moved restlessly, with the result of tightening the sergeant's grip. "But man, what motive could I possibly have had?" he begged nervously. "What motive?"

"From some outside source you learned that O'Malley had been sent to Armistice to investigate you and you knew that, despite your best efforts, he had succeeded in getting the goods. What you didn't know was that already he had sent out his report. I've been almost sure of your guilt ever since I learned that those black and silver fox pelts came from your old company's store room, two of the lot you held out on your employers."

Seymour turned to Moira. "Would you mind, dear, telling those Siwashes to get back to work?"

Please convince them who I am and that I've taken charge in the king's name. That always goes strong with Indians. Make them understand that none of them is to leave the diggings."

Moira seemed to shake herself together from this blow he had delivered with all possible mercy. "I don't exactly understand, friend, but I thank you." She stepped into the circle of wondering natives and repeated his orders in Chinook.

"But he wears no uniform," objected one in English.

"He needs no scarlet tunic," the girl replied. "*He is the law.*" This also she repeated in their jargon of gutturals.

On order, Karmack led the way to the tent. Seymour followed close behind with his arm supporting Moira, who seemed a bit unsteady.

There was a groan from the pretended half-breed when he saw that the lid of the treasure chest was thrown back.

"Since when did the Force take to breaking the locks of honest men?" he snarled.

Instead of answering, Seymour slammed down the lid and motioned his old enemy to seat him-

self upon the chest. Then he crossed the tent and picked up the tell-tale boot. Returning with it, he made a comparison.

"Thought so," he murmured.

There was no need for further measuring and he tossed the gear under the table. Karmack had the biggest feet he had ever seen. By no possibility could one of them have been forced into the boot which he had just flung down.

Knowing nothing of the footprints Seymour had found near the scene of Caswell's killing, Moira O'Malley looked on at the comparison of boots in mystified silence. Karmack seemed to have a better grasp of the reason behind the test.

"I'm no murderer," he muttered, glowering at his captor.

"Wait until I get your latest partner, Kluger," said the sergeant.

Seymour seemed on the verge of enlightening Moira when she raised a hand of caution. "Listen," she whispered.

They heard hoof beats hammering into camp. Some one on horseback was coming at speed. The

sergeant crossed to the tent front and peered out between the flaps.

"Guess we won't have to go for Kluger, after all," he said, still peering.

Karmack muttered an oath, his petulance directed against old lady Luck, who gets the credit for the best and blame for the worst that happens to illogical humans.

"Bonnie—Bonnemort! Where are you?" The deep-throated call came from outside.

"Where d'you suppose?" Seymour called back in a voice that he hoped would pass for the pretended half-breed's.

He turned to Moira, quietly directing her to crouch behind the treasure chest and keep her gun on the ex-factor.

"No more fighting with fists,—please!" she begged.

"There's no woman in this man's case," he whispered, and motioned for silence.

Phil Brewster walked into the tent a moment later, and Seymour realized it was the first time he had seen him on foot. The affable freighter stepped with a limp.

"What you sitting there for, you big boob?" Brewster put his question to Karmack before glancing about the tent.

"Thinking it over, perhaps." From a point back of Brewster, where he had stood unnoticed, Seymour broke in before the pretender could speak for himself.

Brewster whirled, and with the move his gun appeared from handy concealment. But the sergeant had expected some such desperate act and was ready. His left hand caught the freighter's right at the wrist and swung it upward. Brewster's bullet let a look of blue sky through the canvas roof, while the muzzle of the Mountie's revolver prodded the ribs of his suspect. The freighter saw fit to obey a command to drop his weapon.

"Sorry I haven't more bracelets with me," Seymour said. "Moir, if you'll look under the clothes rack, where I found that boot just now, you'll find a length of rope."

"What's all this about, you high-binder?" Brewster demanded.

"You remind me—I neglected to introduce myself when we met yesterday and the day before.

Karmack, there, might tell you that I call myself Seymour, sergeant of the Royal Mounted."

"But he's dead!" blurted out Brewster.

"Not that he knows of," Seymour assured him quietly; "but *you* have a very good reason for thinking so. Now, if you'll oblige by putting your hands behind you—"

When Brewster obeyed, perforce, the sergeant directed Moira to tie the wrists. After he had inspected the knots and recovered the fallen gun, he suggested that Brewster sit down on one of the cots until they were ready to start back to Gold. The freighter, in doing so, swung his right leg over his left knee. From his seat on the opposite cot, Seymour saw on the exposed sole one of the peculiar leather-saving metal plates in which he was so interested—the one that had made its impression in the soil near the scene of the murder. Reaching under the table, he retrieved the spare boot he had thrown there and saw that they matched in every particular.

"Just to make everything according to Hoyle, Brewster," the sergeant said, "I now place you

under arrest for the murder of Bart Caswell, alias Sergeant Seymour."

Brewster seemed stunned at the charge. His eyes, as if by instinct, avoided Seymour's steady gaze. He looked at the scowling Karmack, starting slightly at his first glimpse of the nicked wristlets the man wore.

"Who's the boob now?" snarled Karmack. "Leaving tracks with your bad foot for any fool Mountie to read!"

"Shut up, you fool!" A look of fright crossed Brewster's handsome face. For a second he seemed about to spring upon Karmack. Then, as quickly as it had come, the spasm passed. He turned his eyes on Seymour. "If you ever press this ridiculous charge," he said, "I'll prove it false to the jury. I've done some freighting for the B. & K. outfit, nothing more. Rode in here to-day to collect a bill. Down at the cañon, Kluger passed me on to Bonnemort. I ran into you—and trouble."

After a moment's pause, Brewster continued: "Say, if you really are Sergeant Seymour, who

was the uniformed bird that came to Gold as Bart Caswell?"

"Bart Caswell's widow is ready to tell the court why he killed Ben Tabor in robbing the B. C. X. stage of my uniform and papers," the sergeant answered somewhat cryptically.

"Poor Ruth," murmured Moira. "She really believed."

"Well, I'll be——" Brewster began.

"Told you Caswell was a crook," whined Karmack. "No yellow legs would have let himself be caught the way I got him that day up here on the creek."

Seymour waited for Moira to speak. When she came toward him her face wore the bravest smile he had ever seen on a woman.

"What next, pardner?" she asked whimsically.

"The first step," he told her, "is to rig up some sort of an M. P. seal for that treasure chest I broke open."

Without ceremony, the sergeant lifted Karmack to his feet and ushered him to the left-hand cot. From that seat, the disfigured ne'er-do-well might glare more conveniently at Brewster.

“But that chest holds only frog-gold,” Moira reminded Seymour. “The Siwashes have all the real gold, and it belongs to them.”

“You don’t really think that a close and crooked corporation like Brewster, Kluger and Karmack would supply food, dynamite and expert management for a bunch of Indians only to take their pay in pretty specimens, do you, Moira?”

She studied the proposition from the new angle which his question presented. “It doesn’t seem reasonable, but——”

“It isn’t reasonable,” he interposed, raising the lid of the chest that she might feast her eyes upon its heaping gray store. “This frog-gold, as your father calls it, happens to be platinum—worth six times its weight in gold.”

CHAPTER XXVII

BRIGHT WITH PROMISE

WITH his astonishing declaration of the real richer-than-gold wealth of the Glacier Creek placers, Seymour turned to Brewster for confirmation. "What is the current quotation on platinum?" he asked.

But the freighter no longer was affable. "I'm no bureau of information," he growled.

"Try me," offered Karmack with a return of his old-time effrontery. "Dear eyes, at the present time that platinum is worth a hundred and fifteen simoleons an ounce—was up to a hundred and seventy during the war!"

"And the purest gold brings a trifle over twenty dollars," the sergeant reminded the girl. "You see I was nearly exact."

With a quick glance, as if the presence of such a store of wealth frightened her, Moira lowered the lid.

"Then the Glacier Mission Indians are——" she hesitated.

"Rich—for them," he supplied. "What's more the O'Malley claims between the cañon mouth and the Cheena are heavier with frog-gold than those up the creek, or I don't know my mineralogy. You and your father and Miss Ruth will be near-millionaires."

Seymour would not have cared to explain the worried look that came unbidden into his eyes, had he been taxed with it. Complications foreseen were responsible.

He improvised a flimsy fastening to replace the lock he had broken, and pinned over the chest crack a sheet of paper on which he had written "Officially Sealed, R. Seymour, Sergeant, R. C. M. P." Then he made a young Siwash, picked by Moira, vain for life by swearing him in as a special constable and placing him on guard at the tent door. His instructions were to permit no one to pass until Seymour returned, and he was entrusted with Brewster's gun to support his authority.

Inspection showed that the Siwashes had gone

back to work under "king's orders." Seymour had no thought of telling them how rich they were making themselves, until their status was fixed by the proper court. Meantime they'd be best off, continuing their labor, for "all the gold" allotted them by the spoilers.

With Brewster tied to his saddle and Karmack, still handcuffed, on foot, the prisoners were started down creek under the guns of the sergeant and his volunteer aid. Beneath the non-com.'s arm was a worn boot for a lame right foot, his prize "Exhibit B." First honors in the evidence line were in the commissioner's vault back in Ottawa—"Exhibit A," a pair of fox pelts, one silver and one black. Of the three murders he had solved, that of poor Oliver O'Malley would always have first place in his personal record book.

On the down creek tramp, Seymour told Moira what he knew of the wonder story of platinum. Her missionary father had not been the first to call this occasional associate of gold a nuisance and to throw it away, not knowing what else to do with it. In less than a generation the gray metal had emerged from the lesser metals, crept past sil-

ver and then raced beyond gold into the limelight of popularity. Whatever the ultimate fate of the ore it was certain to remain a treasure-metal until long after Glacier Creek had been mined out.

For his own satisfaction, as well as hers, he outlined the plot against the Indians as he now saw it. Phil Brewster, he believed, had recognized platinum in the frog-gold which the Siwashes were discarding. The freighter had sent back to Montreal for Kluger to direct the harvest. Knowing at least something of Karmack's plight, Kluger had brought the Armistice murderer with him as an assistant and had posed him as a half-breed as part of the disguise. Whether or not the latter knew that the father of the youth he had caused to be slain in the Arctic lived in the immediate vicinity of the platinum bed was a question. At any rate, the criminal probably figured that he would be safer in a sealed British Columbia cañon than in the cafés of the city that lately has become the gayest in North America. Brewster undoubtedly had been riding guard outside under cover of his established freighting business.

The trio had corralled the Indians on their own

claims in the easiest possible way—by giving them all the gold that was sluiced, while they took the six-times richer platinum. Their discovery that Bart Caswell had recognized their precious metal had sealed his death warrant. Its execution had been prompt, as she knew. He could only hope that the official executions which seemed called for would not be too long delayed.

After some persuasion and the reminder that Moira was a persistent young person, he sketched the steps by which he had walked through the local mystery. His conviction that Bart had robbed the stage, based on recognition of the uniform, had given him a “head start” and had proved a lever with the widow Caswell. She had started him on a “richer than gold” search. Moira herself, with her tip about the frog-gold, had spurred him, for he suspected it to be platinum. The squaw tale that the Siwashes were getting all the gold had helped, and the shaking of a platinum nugget from the ore sack had completed his enlightenment. As for the black-hearted Karmack, whose hair had turned red—well, that was an excellent piece of dyer’s art, but one Scarlet Seymour

would be long forgiving himself for not having recognized it as such that memorable night at the Venetian Gardens.

“Do you suppose my being there had anything to do——” began Moira.

“Why, most wonderful girl alive, I particularly wanted to get him to close the books with——” He interrupted himself at thought of the platinum wealth at the mouth of the creek.

They passed the graveyard diggings without disturbing the Siwashes at their labors. At the tent camp in the cañon, Seymour surprised Kluger, sacking platinum for the get-away which Brewster had warned him was imminent. The little man was so preoccupied with his delightful task, and in such fancied security, that the sergeant had a gun to his back before he looked up from the booty. Two additional saddle horses were annexed here, which Moira and Seymour mounted.

At the “gate” they surprised one of the two hired guards in controversy with O’Malley. Anxious about his daughter, the old missionary was trying to talk his way into the gulch. At seeing his employers under arrest, the guard resigned

on the spot and could not hand over his rifle soon enough. On the ride into Gold, the other guard was encountered, headed back to his "work." Single-handed, Shan O'Malley made the last necessary capture, adding another prospective witness for the king's case.

Not until Seymour had gone through the formality of borrowing the town jail from Deputy Hardley, and the prisoners were safely immured, with the ice-box door really locked, did Moira seem to remember her costume. A signal sent from her seat in the saddle brought the sergeant out of the curious crowd about the log calaboose.

"I can't stay to celebrate your victory, Russell," she informed him. "I've got to get back to my tribe—my scrubbing brush. I've just realized that I must look a—a scandal in this rig. Even in Gold, B. C., I have a social standing to maintain."

Her threatened departure surprised him, left him suddenly confused. "Your standing as a heroine in Gold couldn't be disturbed by a blast of dynamite after what you've done to-day," he assured her. "And have you forgotten—don't you

realize what it means that at last I've got my man? I've got to go back to Glacier to-night, you know. I'd thought of dinner and an official escort home."

For a moment she considered, then the eyes which he once had likened as being "smudged in by a sooty finger," flashed him all the love in their world.

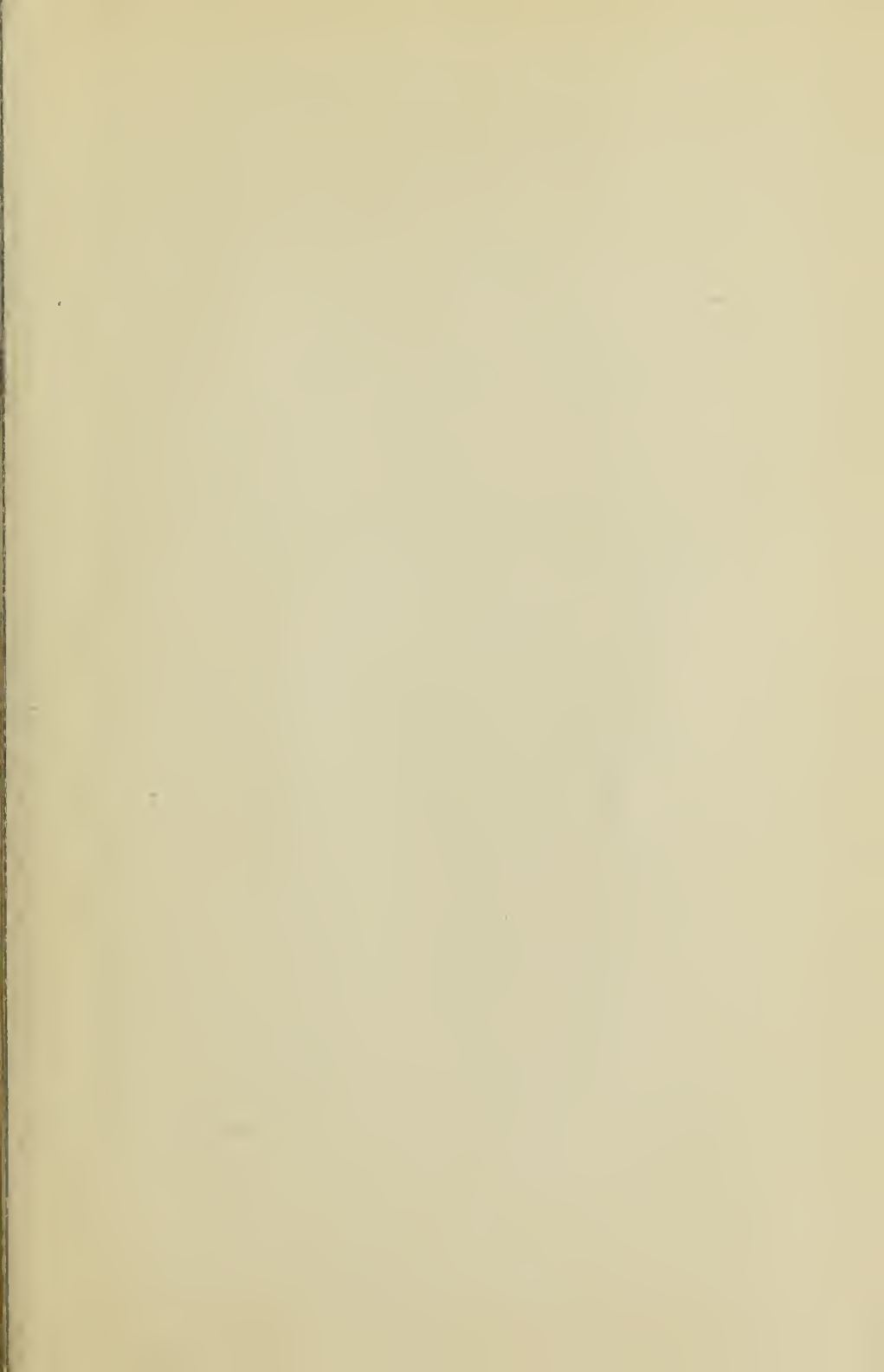
"Sorry I can't wait in this rig, Sergeant Scarlet," she teased, "but there's nothing to hinder your coming to the mission on Glacier as soon as you're ready." She started her horse. "But be sure," she called back to him, "be sure not to forget to bring my father with you. He's the only parson in these diggings."

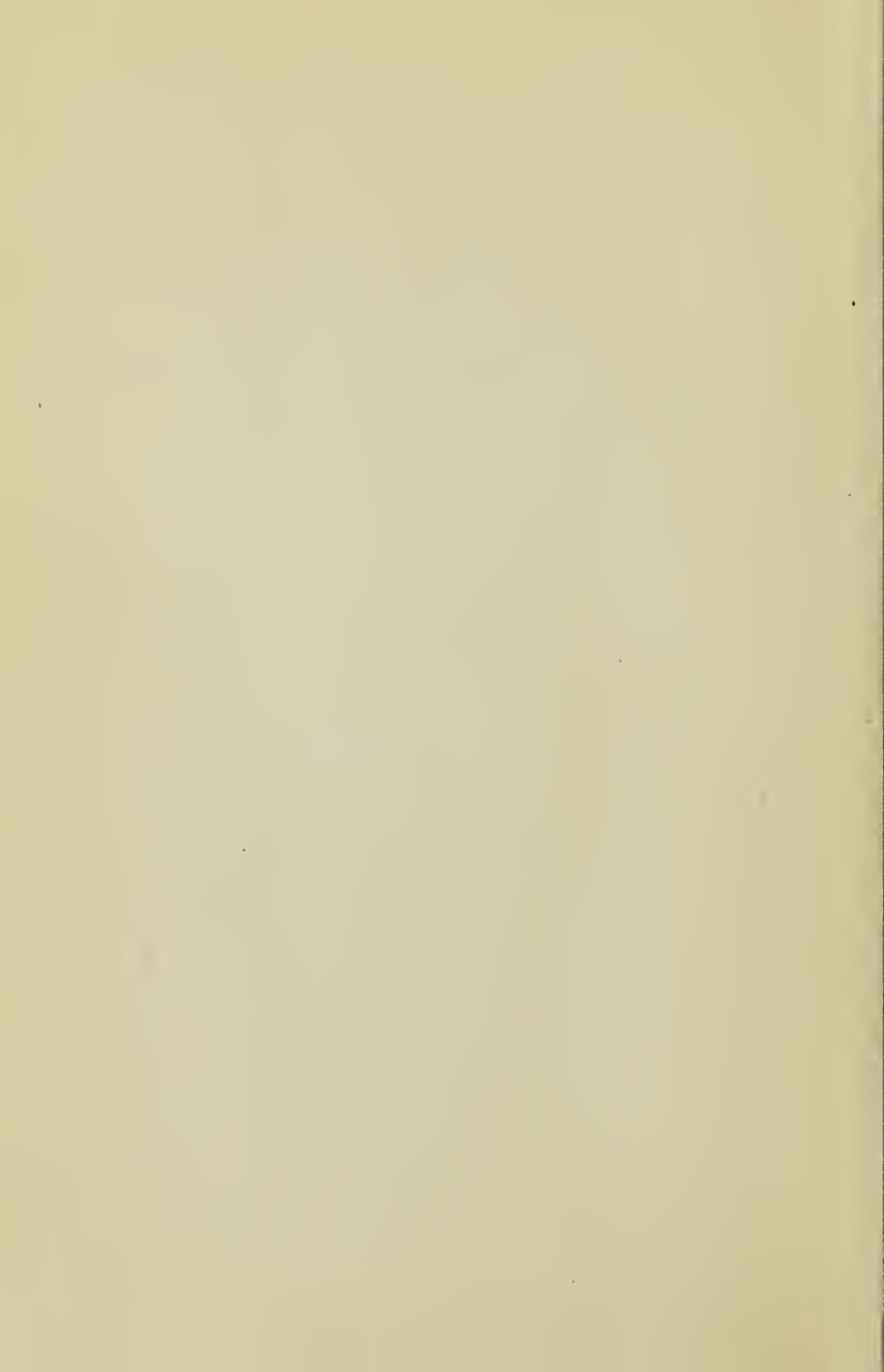
She had gone before he could thank her; but all the platinum on Glacier couldn't buy from him the memory of those recent crowded hours.

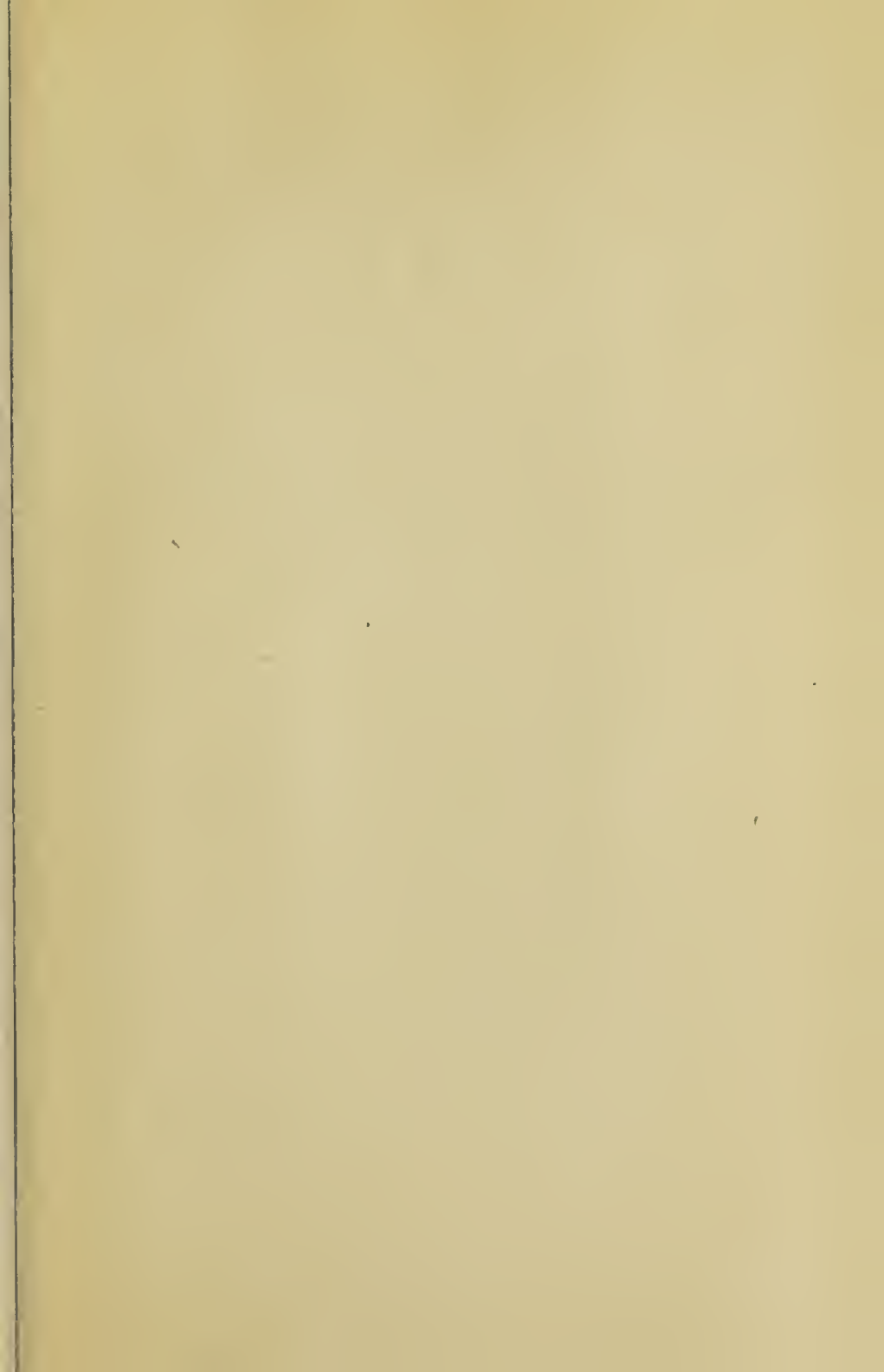
The crowd remembered that he was a member of the Force, even if he had momentarily forgotten that fact. They clamored about him for details of the crime clean-up, few of which they would hear from him. There was Deputy Hardley to be put straight about the B. C. X. hold-up; and Mrs. Caswell to thank for her "richer

than gold" help, and special constables to be selected and sworn for service at the borrowed jail and on the creek. Indeed there was much for Staff-Sergeant Seymour to do in his new domain, but when at last he was free he saw to it that the Rev. Shan O'Malley brushed stirrups with him all the way to Glacier.

THE END.







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